

The Normative Influence of Climate Movements on the UNFCCC COP Negotiations

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Abstract

This thesis explores the normative influence of climate movements on climate negotiations—specifically, how global norms advocated by climate movements and transnational advocacy networks influence the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conferences of the Parties (COPs). Building on the work of Nisbett and Spaiser (2023), which demonstrates that global climate movements permeate discourses around global climate change negotiations, this thesis further examines the impact of these global norms, normative frames, and configurations on COP negotiators and negotiations. The thesis employs the Theory of *Cycles of Norm Change* (Sandholtz, 2017) as its core theoretical framework. Norms rarely emerge or shift in isolation; rather, they are shaped by complex normative interlinkages and the strategic agency of diverse actors and alliances. These processes often involve the formation of norm clusters and constellations, where multiple norms interact and influence one another. Consequently, collective moral arguments and ongoing contestation among actors play a significant role in shaping how and why norms evolve. The thesis, therefore, examines the interplay between these factors to explain normative shifts.

The research adopts a qualitative methodology comprising two datasets: a discourse analysis of COP cover decisions and a qualitative content analysis of 20 semi-structured expert interviews. By triangulating the data with existing literature, the study identifies patterns of norm change and normative shifts, tracing how climate movements influence negotiators, negotiations, and outcomes. By examining case studies of key global norms—such as anti-fossil fuel, intergenerational equity, climate justice, loss and damage, human rights, global earth stewardship, ecocide and sufficiency as a principled idea—the thesis evaluates how these norms are referenced, adapted, or resisted in the negotiation space.

The research finds that climate movements act as norm entrepreneurs, seeding and disseminating normative configurations, while norm champions—including states, alliances, or individuals—play a crucial role in amplifying influences that aid normative shifts and gains in formal negotiations. Conversely, norm antipreneurs, including powerful fossil-fuel dependent actors, actively resist norm diffusion. The thesis contributes to the scholarship of norm dynamics, offering a conceptual lens to grasp the interwoven processes of normative emergence, contestation, and consolidation.

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Abbreviations

ACE — Action for Climate Empowerment

AfCHPR — African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights

AGN — African Group of Negotiators

AILAC — Independent Association of Latin America and the Caribbean

ALBA — Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America

AOSIS — Alliance of Small Island States

AREA — Asia Renewable Energy Association (*context-dependent*)

ASEAN — Association of Southeast Asian Nations

BASIC — Brazil, South Africa, India, China

BINGO — Business and Industry Non-Governmental Organisations

BP — British Petroleum (*context-dependent*)

BRICS — Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa

CAN — Climate Action Network

CASE — Climate Action and Sustainable Energy (*context-dependent*)

CBD — Convention on Biological Diversity

CBDR — Common but Differentiated Responsibilities

CCES — Centre for Climate and Environmental Studies (*from Paris data references*)

CCS — Carbon Capture and Storage

CEO — Chief Executive Officer

CfRN — Coalition for Rainforest Nations

CJN — Climate Justice Now!

CMA — Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement

CMP — Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol

COP — Conference of the Parties (*UNFCCC*)

COSIS — Commission of Small Island States

COVID — Coronavirus Disease

CP — Conference Proceedings (*context-dependent*)

CRC — Convention on the Rights of the Child

CSO/CSOs — Civil Society Organisations

CYNP — Climate Youth Negotiators Programme

EDF — Environmental Defense Fund
EIG — Environmental Integrity Group
ENGO — Environmental Non-Governmental Organisation
ESCAP — United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
EU — European Union
FFF — Fridays for Future
G77 — Group of 77
GCF — Green Climate Fund
GGA — Global Goal on Adaptation
GHG — Greenhouse Gas
GST — Global Stocktake
HRC — Human Rights Council
IACtHR — Inter American Court of Human Rights
ICAO — International Civil Aviation Organization
ICJ — International Court of Justice
IEA — International Energy Agency
IISD — International Institute for Sustainable Development
IMO — International Maritime Organization
INDCs — Intended Nationally Determined Contributions
IPCC — Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
IPO — Indigenous Peoples' Organisation
IRENA — International Renewable Energy Agency
ITLOS — International Tribunal for Law of Sea
JCM — Joint Crediting Mechanism
KP — Kyoto Protocol
LDCs — Least Developed Countries
LLDCs — Landlocked Developing Countries
LMDCs — Like-Minded Developing Countries
MRV — Measurement, Reporting, and Verification
NAZCA — Non-State Actor Zone for Climate Action
NAP — National Adaptation Plans
NAPAs — National Adaptation Programmes of Action
NbS — Nature Based Solutions
NCQG — New Collective Quantified Goal

NDCs — Nationally Determined Contributions

NGO/NGOs — Non-Governmental Organisations

PA — Paris Agreement

REDD+ — Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation

RINGO — Research and Independent Non-Governmental Organisations

SB — Subsidiary Bodies

SDGs — Sustainable Development Goals

SDM — Sustainable Development Mechanism

SIDS — Small Island Developing States

TANs — Transnational Advocacy Networks

UK — United Kingdom

UN — United Nations

UNCBD —

UNCLOS — United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea

UNEP — United Nations Environment Programme

UNFCCC — United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

UNGA — United Nations General Assembly

US — United States

WEDO — Women's Environment and Development Organisation

WGC — Women and Gender Constituency

WIM — Warsaw International Mechanism on Loss and Damage

YOUNGO — Youth Constituency of the UNFCCC

Chapter 1: Introduction

Climate change is pervasive, with multidimensional implications and disproportionate causes and effects. Human activities, primarily greenhouse gas emissions (GHG),¹ have unquestionably caused global warming, increasing the average global surface temperature to an estimated 1.34-1.41°C above the pre-industrial baseline (World Meteorological Organization, 2025). Although climate science clearly calls for rapid and systemic transformation to limit warming to 1.5°C, analyses state that the world is on track to reach to 3°C or more (MacLean, 2020). GHG emissions worldwide are rising, with both past and present emissions varying significantly due to unsustainable practices in energy, land use, as well as differences in lifestyles, consumption and production patterns (IPCC, 2023). The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) defines climate change in Article 1(2) as:

A change of climate which is attributed directly or indirectly to human activity that alters the composition of the global atmosphere, and which is in addition to natural climate variability observed over comparable time periods (1992a)

The consequences of anthropogenic global warming are both extensive and severe, requiring a politically coordinated response. The melting of glaciers and ice sheets contributes to rising sea levels, causing sinking islands and receding coastlines (Pörtner *et al.*, 2019)—as such promoting mass migrations, insecurity, and poverty (Balasubramaniam *et al.*, 2018; Arruda Filho, Torres and Jacobi, 2024). Moreover, extreme weather events are occurring with greater frequency and intensity, driving shifts in ecosystems: resulting in biodiversity loss, coral bleaching, disruptions to planetary systems, and threatening the long-term stability of life on Earth (Bolan *et al.*, 2024). Collectively, these planetary risks pose significant socio-economic challenges, undermining human health, food and water security, and livelihoods across the globe (Gupta *et al.*, 2024). Consequently, a palpable sense of betrayal among the public over political inaction on climate change is increasing (see Thew, Middlemiss and Paavola, 2020; Buchanan *et al.*, 2022; Nisbett and Spaiser, 2023; Ann Samuel, 2024). In light of the

¹ According to Intergovernmental Panel for Climate Change (IPCC), greenhouse gases are gaseous constituents of the atmosphere, both natural and anthropogenic, that absorb and emit radiation at specific wavelengths within the spectrum of infrared radiation emitted by the Earth's surface, atmosphere, and clouds. This property causes the greenhouse effect. Water vapour (H₂O), carbon dioxide (CO₂), nitrous oxide (N₂O), methane (CH₄), and ozone (O₃) are the primary greenhouse gases in the Earth's atmosphere. (see IPCC, 2022 Annex B - Glossary)

widespread and uneven impacts of climate change, issues of governance—justice, and accountability have assumed a central place in contemporary international discourse.

In response to these escalating and deeply interconnected crises, international mechanisms have emerged to facilitate collective action—most notably through the institutional framework of the UNFCCC.² While Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) frames climate change using the best available science, the Conference of Parties (COP), meets annually to discuss international society's response within the UNFCCC (Ralph, 2023). International climate negotiations are shaped by political debates over responsibility, burden-sharing, and effective solutions. Analysing the political dimension of international climate negotiations raises complex questions and debates, making the issue highly contentious both domestically and internationally (Cass, 2020). Yet, the role of the UNFCCC with 198 parties³ to negotiate around climate action and ambition remains important and arguably promising. Nevertheless, the complexity of the international climate negotiations calls for attention.

Climate change first emerged on the international agenda in the late 1980s (Bodansky, 2022). The evolution of the international climate change regime and the role of international negotiations is best understood through four distinct phases (Bodansky, Brunnée and Rajamani, 2017). The initial phase was defined by the negotiation and adoption of the UNFCCC in 1992 (UNFCCC, 2025a)—which laid the institutional and normative foundations for global climate governance (Bodansky, 2022). The second phase centred on the Kyoto Protocol:⁴ which legally bound developed country parties to emission reduction targets—establishing the need for regulation. The third phase resulting in the adoption of the Copenhagen Accord in 2009⁵ and the Cancun Agreements in 2010⁶—which although failing on many levels of procedure, reliability, and the spirit of multilateralism (see Muller, 2010; Rajamani, 2010), laid the premise for attempts to globalise regulation (Bodansky, 2022). The political significance of Copenhagen Accord was instrumental in the negotiation of Paris Agreement (Rajamani, 2010).

² Throughout this thesis, the term “UNFCCC” is used interchangeably to refer either to the *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change*—the 1992 treaty establishing the overarching framework for international climate cooperation (UNFCCC May 9, 1992, 1771 U.N.T.S. 107)—or to its institutional apparatus, including the UNFCCC Secretariat, as the context indicates.

³ 198 parties, i.e., 197 countries (all United Nations member states, plus the State of Palestine, Cook Islands, and Niue) and the European Union (as a regional economic integration organisation); (See UNFCCC, 2025d).

⁴ Kyoto Protocol, Dec 10, 1997, 2303 U.N.T.S. 162

⁵ Copenhagen Accord, Decision 2/CP.15, UN Doc FCCC/CP/2009/11/Add.1

⁶ Cancun Agreements, Decision 1/CP.16, UN Doc FCCC/CP/2010/7/Add.1, 2.

The fourth and ongoing phase is characterised by the negotiation and implementation of the Paris Agreement,⁷ which continues to play a pivotal role in shaping the contemporary international response to climate change.

What was innovative about the Paris Agreement was the so-called “ratchet mechanism” or “ambition cycle,” which politically positioned parties to progressively enhance their nationally determined contributions (NDCs) through a transparent reporting mechanism (Bodansky, 2022, p. 22). Furthermore, Voigt argues that this mechanism fosters accountability by linking transparency and compliance processes, thereby establishing a procedural continuum—enabling progression in the ambition cycle through the assessment of parties’ performance in relation to the Agreement’s provisions and its associated mechanisms and procedures (Voigt and Gao, 2020, p. 55).

Accordingly, international environmental agreements are put into practice, at both domestic and international levels, often through non-state actors who exert pressure on parties. Such pressure can be as influential as formal legal obligations in shaping actors’ behaviour (see, Victor, Rautiala and Skolnikoff, 1998; Shelton, 2000; Voigt and Gao, 2020). Behaviour is often shaped and reshaped through the proliferation of public discourse generated by social (or climate) movements⁸ that engage with political realities (Smith *et al.*, 2017).

The growing relevance and centrality of climate movements and non-state actors is the focus of this thesis. While the evolution of international climate governance has received considerable scholarly attention, far less attention has been paid to how non-state actors—particularly climate movements—shape the contours of multilateral negotiations and normative change within the UNFCCC framework. In recent years, these actors have gained unprecedented visibility and influence, challenging as well as complementing the formal diplomatic processes that traditionally defined global climate governance. Since climate ambition relies not only on state commitments but also on societal mobilisation and norm diffusion, understanding the interface between global climate movements and the international negotiating arena is increasingly vital. This research, therefore, examines the extent and manner in which climate movements—through their advocacy and norm entrepreneurship—shape the politics and outcomes of UNFCCC negotiations. Against this backdrop, the following section

⁷ Paris Agreement, Dec. 12, 2015, U.N. Doc. FCCC/CP/2015/L.9/Rev.1.

⁸ See *Chapter 1 Section 1.2* to read how climate movements are defined in this thesis.

outlines the specific research problem addressed in this thesis, focusing on the influence of global climate movement norms on international climate negotiations.

1.1 Research Problem

The thesis builds on the study by Nisbett and Spaiser, (2023). Here, the scholars used computational analysis of a large Twitter/X dataset from 2014-2021 to show that the global climate movements with their normative arguments permeate discourses around global climate change negotiations: specifically, the annual UNFCCC Conference of Parties (COP). The study reveals that youth climate movements have advanced global norms such as anti-fossil fuel norms, intergenerational equity, human rights in the context of climate change, and climate justice norms, among others, which have received increased attention in public discourse around the UNFCCC COPs. The study also demonstrates that this normative change was aided by norm champions, who diffused the norms promoted by youth climate activists to wider circles. However, due to its reliance on Twitter/X data, the study does not address the impact of these global norms on COP negotiators and negotiations.

This thesis addresses this gap through a qualitative analysis of expert interviews with COP negotiators and officials, complemented by an examination of official COP negotiation documents (i.e., the cover decisions).⁹ The guiding research question for the thesis is therefore: *How do global norms advocated by climate movements influence the international climate negotiations at the UNFCCC COPs?*

This question is broken down further into three sub-research questions which guide the three analysis chapters in the thesis (Chapter 4, 5, and 6). The three sub-research questions are:

1. Which global norms advanced by transnational climate advocacy groups (and climate movements) are referenced in international climate negotiations?
2. How do these referenced global norms influence negotiations and agreements?
3. Who are the norm champions advocating for these global norms, and who are the antipreneurs blocking these global norms during the negotiations?

In sum, by investigating these three sub-research questions, the thesis seeks to advance understanding of how global norms originating in climate movements are taken up, negotiated, and contested within the formal processes of international climate negotiation.

⁹ See *Chapter 3 - Methodology*

1.2 Defining Norms and Climate Movements

Before delving further into the thesis, this section defines the key concepts the thesis grapples with throughout.

1.2.1 Norms

There is no single agreed-upon definition of a norm, as the term is used across various disciplines (e.g., sociology, psychology, economics, law, and others). In International Relations (IR) it can be best referred to as “a standard of appropriate behaviour for actors with a given identity” (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998, p. 891). Even so, there are two distinct positions through which “norms” are understood in IR: first, a community understands norms as expressions of a given identity, following a constitutive script; and second, norms are seen as intersubjectively constructed, where their meaning emerges from the practice of enacting and re-enacting those norms (Wiener, 2014, p. 19). That said, either way, norms are “an ideal conceptual tool for operationalising processes of social construction” (Hoffmann, 2010, p. 2). Norms function as the language and grammar of international politics, providing structure, order, and stability for the global system and the actors who adhere to them (see Kratochwil, 1989; Cortell and Davis, 2000; Onuf, 2012; Moore, 2025). Norm scholarship often differentiates between prescriptive or injunctive norms, which mandate or dictate desirable behaviours within a group, and descriptive norms, which describe commonly observed behaviours within a group regardless of their moral dimension (Cialdini, Kallgren and Reno, 1991). Sandholtz suggests that the characteristic that sets norms apart from other social phenomena such as customs, traditions, values, or fashions is their prescriptive nature, or the idea of how things should be done (2017). Yet, according to Sandholtz, even crucial terms like *norms* suffer abstractness (2017). Certain norms undergo extended periods of dispute, leading to either alterations in the norm, its rejection, or ongoing conflicts (Zimmermann, 2016; Niemann and Schillinger, 2017). Whereas other norms are adopted with little resistance across (Traven, 2015). Quissell highlights how norms can be explored with respect to how they change and diffuse—by paying attention to the moral content of norms and how they shape interactions between other norms or actors (2022).

Global norms are norms that pertain to states and other international actors (e.g., transnational companies) and define what counts as acceptable and desirable or unacceptable and reprehensible behaviour; international actors can expect reward or sanctioning when adhering to or violating a global norm (Risse, 1999; Risse-Kappen, Ropp and Sikkink, 1999; Green,

2018; Nisbett and Spaiser, 2023). Jurkovich, (2020, pp. 2–3) emphasises that a norm requires not only identifying the actor expected to exhibit the behaviour, but also the existence of a collectively shared belief within society that the problem, the behaviour, and the underlying moral principle are sufficiently well-defined to allow for the identification of those who resist/block norms. Thus, global norms are often the subject of debate and contention (see Acharya, 2004, 2011, 2018; Wiener, 2004, 2008, 2008; Krook and True, 2012; Zwingel, 2012; Zimmerer, 2014; Panke and Petersohn, 2016; Wolff and Zimmermann, 2016; Zimmermann, 2017) Global norms with respect to climate change inform shared principles and expectations, guiding international efforts to address the urgent challenge of climate change through collective action, responsibility, and key strategies.

However, any action or lack thereof inevitably places burden on some and benefits on others, making normative choices an inherent part of policymaking (Dooley *et al.*, 2021). Normative, refers to the examination and deliberation of an issue based on its desirability or lack thereof (Beck *et al.*, 2015). Thus, the normative framework that emerges in response to climate change seeks to reconcile national objectives with global obligations where international solidarity and collaboration is emphasised (Beardsworth, 2021). Analysing international negotiations, like UNFCCC COPs, therefore, is important to understand how global norms advanced by climate movements or transnational advocacy networks (TANs) resonate in the negotiations and with negotiators. Scholars engage in debates regarding the influence of global norms on the actions of states and other actors, deliberating on the reasons, methods, and conditions that shape such dynamics (Puschkarsky, 2009). Norms underlie an actor's preferences and interests, and they can be challenging to observe or examine (Gross and Vostroknutov, 2022). According to Risse and Sikkink, (1999) the adoption of global norms is always subject to the surrounding circumstances, particular situations, and the configuration of actors involved, as ideas are not completely unrestricted in their dissemination.

An idea becomes a principled idea when it informs “the proper behaviour of actors with a given identity” (Katzenstein, 1996, p. 5) and is inherent to the character and content of a norm (Orchard and Wiener, 2024). The idea may or may not evolve into a norm. It is based on a core normative belief, but this idea is not always shared collectively, nor does it always imply a clear expectation of behaviour (Goldstein and Keohane, 1993). Both norms and principled ideas help explain why actors behave as they do, but they operate at different levels of abstraction and social embeddedness. Principled ideas are broader, more abstract value commitments or moral ideals that inspire and inform the development of norms but are not

themselves operational rules of behaviour (Ralph, 2023). They represent how they as ideas motivate norm entrepreneurs—actors who advocate for change by promoting these values (Ralph, 2023). Unlike norms, which are behaviourally prescriptive and widely shared, principled ideas remain aspirational until they are diffused widely enough to become part of the collective repertoire of expectations in international society.

Norms and principled ideas are advocated through normative frames and arguments. In the context of climate movements and how norms are diffused, the thesis extensively talks about these tactics and methods of influence; but I clarify here that what one understands as moral is often cross-cultural although variable—it can be one thing and/or many thing(s) at once beyond a spatial-temporal understanding (i.e., what is moral to one State can be immoral or amoral to another; however, with shifting geopolitics the same state can have different or multiple directions regarding what it deems moral) (Graham *et al.*, 2013). Yet, the power morality wields in politics is undeniable, often rooted in practice (see Sandel, 2003; MacIntyre, 2013; Choudhary, 2018). I base my research in understanding morality by aligning to Nisbett and Spaiser (2023) who draw on the Moral Foundation Theory with a focus on the two foundations care or harm-avoidance and fairness (Graham *et al.*, 2013). Thus, moral principles can shape state behaviours and politics to influence norm change in international climate negotiations warrants attention.

1.2.2 Climate Movements

In response to the climate crisis, the climate movements and transnational advocacy networks (TANs) for climate action, play an important part—by influencing the adoption, evolution, and diffusion of international norms (Nisbett and Spaiser, 2023). Nevertheless, the extent to which their normative arguments are taken up by negotiators and in negotiations is unexplored.

Climate movements refer to a diverse array of social and political movements that seek to address the issue of climate change navigate transition to a more sustainable and just society. Their demands are largely based on scientific findings and the political commitments to the Paris Agreement (Pohlmann *et al.*, 2021). Climate movements can thus be defined as social movements which include grassroots organisations, indigenous groups, youth movements, and other civil society actors who engage in various forms of activism, such as protests, civil disobedience, lobbying, and advocacy campaigns for climate action. This thesis centres on climate movements, i.e., non-state actors organised through transnational advocacy groups and networks for climate action. Given the scope of the study on UNFCCC COP negotiations, the

analysis focuses on movements with global influence; that said, purely national or local movements are excluded unless they also operate transnationally and seek to shape international climate policy.

Throughout the thesis, climate movements and TANs for climate action are repeatedly and synonymously used. TANs work on an issue (here, climate action) at an international level, and its members are connected through shared values, a mutual language, and extensive sharing of information and resources (Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Risse-Kappen, Ropp and Sikkink, 1999). They shape social processes by which macro-level collective action outcomes emerge in world politics (Hadden and Jasny, 2019) or legal interpretations or adjudication for the same (Higham *et al.*, 2021; Ann Samuel, 2023, 2024c).

The evolution of climate movements, and why it is significant to climate negotiations today is important. Climate movements, together with civil society, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), and other non-state actors, exert pressure on parties in the UNFCCC COP negotiations. To comprehend the influence of climate movements with respect to its increasing prominence, I analyse it in four stages. In the first stage i.e., from the inception of UNFCCC in the mid-1990s, non-state actors (including NGOs, activists, and scientists) were formally included but remained peripheral. At COP1 in Berlin, 1995, civil society observers had minimal influence as governments began the negotiations. One instance, however was on 7 April 1995, during the Closing Plenary, proceedings were disrupted by protesters who descended from the balcony, vocalising dissatisfaction with the delegates' actions and displaying banners and leaflets (IISD Earth Negotiations Bulletin, 1995). Security promptly removed the demonstrators, while some attendees applauded in support. President of COP1 Dr. Angela Merkel (Former Chancellor of Germany) noted that the assembly had been presented with another perspective—noting the constructive role of the NGOs (IISD Earth Negotiations Bulletin, 1995). Throughout the late 1990s and early 2000s, climate activism was largely niche; while coalitions such as the Climate Action Network lobbied delegates and organised occasional events, large-scale public mobilisation was rare. Civil society participation at early COPs remained relatively small but stable from year to year, in stark contrast to the exponential growth observed in contemporary years. By the mid-2000s, concepts of climate justice began to emerge from grassroots and organisations from the developing countries, broadening the climate movement's focus to equity and human rights, and setting the stage for larger mobilisations in the successive decade (see Gach, 2019; Thew, Middlemiss and Paavola, 2020; Lefstad and Paavola, 2023).

The second stage marked a turning point for climate activism from COP15 in Copenhagen, 2009. COP15 witnessed unprecedented civil society mobilisation and over 40,000 accreditation requests for observer status at the COP, vastly surpassing the venue's 15,000 capacity and highlighting intense public engagement (IISD, 2008) COP15 further saw global advocacy network of 700 NGOs across over ninety countries who joined in to lobby for stronger climate action (Hadden, 2015, p. 3). On 24 October 2009, the 350.org campaign coordinated 5,200 actions across 181 countries, collectively demanding an equitable and effective response to the climate crisis (White, 2009). More than 100,000 demonstrators took to the streets of Copenhagen for the *Global Day of Action* during the COP—marking the world's largest ever protest, as of that time, about global warming (Zee and Batty, 2009; Dimitrov, 2010).

The third stage marking the influence of climate movements where from 2010-2015; where increasing integration of non-state actors were observed. In the years between COP15 and COP21, climate activism continued to mount globally. On September 21, 2014, more than 400,000 people took to streets of Manhattan for the *People's Climate March* making it the largest climate change demonstration in United States, which influenced COP21 in Paris (Young, 2015). The march was led by low-income communities of colour and Indigenous Peoples—those most affected by climate and fossil fuel impacts. The *People's Climate March* emerged from a strategic partnership bridging these diverse demographic groups—as such, strategic solidarity was garnered ahead of COP21 (Young, 2015). Throughout the year of COP21, France encouraged non-state actors to register their commitments in the Non-state Actor Zone for Climate Action (NAZCA) Portal launched in 2014 under the Lima-Paris Action Agenda (UNFCCC, 2025b). By Paris, the portal featured nearly 11,000 pledges from 2,250 cities, 150 regions, 2,025 companies, 424 investors, and 235 civil society groups (CCES, 2015).

The fourth and current stage, post-Paris, has been characterised by surging youth activism and the emergence of polycentric climate action since 2016. From 2018, the Fridays for Future (FFF) sparked school strikes in more than 150 countries, mobilising millions of students across the globe to protest against climate inaction (see Foran, Gray and Grosse, 2017; Wahlström, 2019; Nakabuye, Nirere and Oladosu, 2020; Ann Samuel, 2023; Nisbett and Spaiser, 2023). In recent years, there has been a notable surge in climate movements (see Wahlström, 2019; Ann Samuel, 2023). In September 2019 half a million people marched with Greta Thunberg, the Swedish climate activist, in Montreal (Madénian, 2025). In the NAZCA Climate Action Portal, as of June 2025, there are 43,185 actors (state and non-state) (UNFCCC, 2025b).

In summary, clarifying the definition and exploring the literature around norms and climate movements provides a necessary premise for this thesis and how the thesis is structured.

1.3 Thesis Structure

The receptivity of international climate negotiations to global norms promoted by climate movements, as well as the integration of normative discourses into formal decision-making processes, remain underexplored. The complex interplay between external advocacy and internal diplomatic procedures creates a gap in comprehending how certain norms gain traction while others remain marginalised.

The thesis is primarily structured into eight chapters.

Following the Introduction chapter (which is this chapter); *Chapter 2: Review of Theory*, explores the theoretical framework and literature around international norms research. In this chapter, I introduce the Theory on *Cycles of Norm Change* (Sandholtz, 2017) as a theoretical framework to examine three-dimensional norm diffusion (Lantis and Wunderlich (2022), and how it relates to my thesis. A review of the theory provides the framework to analyse how different norms travel in a non-linear way(s) and within a dynamic spatio-temporal context determined by agency: i.e., state and non-state actors. By engaging with scholarship on norm research, constructivism, and related theoretical perspectives, the chapter provides a robust foundation for the subsequent analysis chapters.

Chapter 3: Methodology details the methodological approach of the thesis, which combines qualitative content analysis of elite semi-structured interviews and discourse analysis of the UNFCCC COP cover decisions. It also elaborates on the triangulation approach used to identify emergent and recurring global norms across both document analysis and interview transcripts. The chapter reflects on the epistemological orientation of the research and discusses the ethical and practical limitations encountered in the field, including constraints in interviewee access and interpretative challenges posed by normative language.

Chapter 4: Global Norms and International Climate Negotiations responds to the first sub-research question of the thesis: Which global norms advanced by transnational climate advocacy groups (and climate movements) are referenced in international climate negotiations? The chapter maps the broader normative framework surrounding climate negotiations and identifies eight global norms—anti-fossil fuel, climate justice, intergenerational equity, human rights, loss and damage, global environmental stewardship, ecocide, and sufficiency (as a

principled idea)—that are invoked, contested, or reinforced in negotiation processes. Through interview data analysis the chapter shows how these norms interact and sometimes coalesce into clusters that build resilience against contestation. The chapter also traces how normative references vary across different negotiation spaces, actors, and historical timelines.

Chapter 5: Influence of Global Norms on Negotiations and Agreements responds to the second sub-research question: How do these referenced global norms influence negotiations and agreements? Here, the chapter investigates how climate movements and their normative framings have permeated the UNFCCC COP negotiations. Drawing on interview data, the chapter examines how these movements as norm entrepreneurs advocate and push specific global norms into negotiation language and decisions. It unpacks the mechanisms of norm diffusion, including argumentation, narrative framing, lobbying, and public mobilisation among other. The chapter identifies cases where strategic alliances across civil society and youth delegations have amplified normative influence within formal negotiation tracks.

Chapter 6: Norm Champions and Norm Antipreneurs answers the third sub-research question: Who are the norm champions advocating for these global norms and who are the antipreneurs blocking these global norms during the negotiations? By focusing explicitly on agency (i.e., actors and their strategies), this chapter identifies who the norm champions and antipreneurs are in the climate negotiation space. Drawing on empirical interview evidence and theoretical grounding, the chapter assesses how such interwoven and nuanced agency of state and non-state actors shape the meaning and direction of global norms—tracing norm change and normative shifts. It provides considerable examples and evidence of individuals, state actors, and alliances that serve as norm champions, and contrasts them with norm antipreneurs, typically fossil fuel-dependent states or industry-aligned actors that work to preserve the status quo. The chapter maps the resulting normative conflicts and their implications for consensus-building at COPs.

In *Chapter 7: COP Negotiation Processes, the Cover Decisions, and Normative Gains* norm permeation by climate movements into climate negotiations are not just investigated with respect to interview data but are triangulated with UNFCCC COP cover decisions. This traces the visible imprint of normative arguments in final negotiation outcomes, and texts—where patterns in how norms have been embedded in official documents/texts are identified—observing: progress, change, status quo, and regress of norms over time.

Finally, *Chapter 8* concludes the thesis by summarising the study results on the normative influence of climate movements on COP negotiations and exploring the limits of the research, as well as offering ways forward for future research directions and scope.

To summarise, this thesis contributes to the literature on international relations and climate politics while also promising to advance environmental scholarship around multilateral negotiations. Throughout the thesis I examine how norms, normative configurations, and normative frames interact with the complex political dynamics within UNFCCC COP negotiations and how they are subject to multiple interpretations, dynamic complexity, and nuance.

In the study, the thesis acknowledges the researcher's inherent subjectivities and preconceptions, which might have limited and/or enhanced the study. Acknowledging the same, my contribution to the field primarily aims to expand the critical debate on the political urgency required to address the climate crisis, with normative frameworks offering one potential pathway forward.

Chapter 2: Review of Theory

This chapter studies and review the theory of the thesis. As such, I introduce key concepts, perspectives from literature, and theoretical framework—on how global norms interact with each other and the role of agency—as they evolve, change, and contest during the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conference of Parties (COPs).

The chapter will be divided into three subsections. First, I begin with broader debates of global norm scholarship and analyse why the Theory on *Cycles of Norm Change* (Sandholtz, 2017) is suited as a theoretical framework to answer the central research question of the thesis. Second, I analyse how global norms form norm clusters and norm constellations (i.e., to explore how global norms interact with each other) in shaping and guiding discourses and actions surrounding climate change. Finally, I will define and analyse the terms: norm entrepreneurs, norm champions, and norm antipreneurs; also exploring why they are important (if they are) in the analysis of international climate negotiation by evoking the relevance of agency through these concepts. The seminal work of Finnemore and Sikkink observes that ‘norms do not appear out of thin air [but are] actively built by agents’ (1998, p. 888). The role of agency is, therefore, important—though not limited to norm entrepreneurs, champions, and antipreneurs. However, my choice of these three concepts constituting agency, is to offer a starting point to understand holistically as to how global norms are diffused further in international negotiations and the role of agency in it.

2.1 Theoretical framework:

The theoretical framework I employ in this research is the Theory on *Cycles of Norm Change* by Sandholtz (2017) with a special focus on the third stage (argumentation), the fourth stage (norm change), and the transition between these two stages. The literature review in this chapter offers to provide a basis for the choice of this framework, and how it will aid in my study.

In the realm of international politics, theories serve as critical lenses through which we analyse and interpret complex dynamics that shape the interactions between states, non-state actors, and global institutions. Over the past four decades, the examination of international norms has emerged as a significant conceptual advancement within the field of International Relations (IR). Various theories are employed in literature on global norms to explain its evolution, recognise its emergence with its implications for societies and/or states, and understand why certain norms carry more weight than others in the realm of international politics (see Klotz,

1995b; Florini, 1996; Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998; Wiener, 2008a; Krook and True, 2012; Zwingel, 2012; Deitelhoff and Zimmermann, 2020).

The field of constructivist norms research has made noteworthy contributions to enhance the comprehension of the processes by which norms propagate, fail to propagate, or change throughout their diffusion (Hoffmann, 2010). Certain norms undergo long periods of contestation—leading to outcomes such as norm change, rejection, or persistent conflict (Zimmermann, 2016; Niemann and Schillinger, 2017) whereas there are also norms that are quickly adopted with lesser resistance across different societies (Traven, 2015). Albeit scholars often employ terms like *generations*, *waves* or *turns*, to delineate the historical progression of the field, the boundaries between research phases are not always clearly defined, however, this language, despite its potential for criticism, continues to offer utility in understanding the field's evolution (Ralph, 2023)—as such, the 'three waves' of norm scholarship are observed (Bettiza and Dionigi, 2015; Stefan, 2017).

2.1.1 Three Waves of Norm Research

Early research in constructivism constituting the first wave of norm research: primarily around 1980-1990s offered frameworks for comprehending strategies and processes that involved in promoting global norms, as well as the conditions and mechanisms that drive norm diffusion in a linear progression (see Hoffmann, 2010; Rosert, 2012, p. 600; Zimmermann, 2016, p. 100; Lantis, 2017; Sandholtz, 2017; Stimmer, 2019). The studies aimed to illustrate the influential role of norms in shaping social structures and to provide explanations for the process of norm diffusion (Haas, 1992; Klotz, 1995b; Katzenstein, 1996; Checkel, 1997; Price, 1998; Risse-Kappen, Ropp and Sikkink, 1999; Tannenwald, 1999). One seminal model—the life-cycle model, proposed by Finnemore and Sikkink, explores how a norm undergoes a series of sequential stages wherein its meaning is clarified—adhering to linear perspectives on norm development, culminating in the internalisation of a norm (1998). That, once it is internalised, its meaning is fixed (Stefan, 2017), often even privileging only the successful norms (Carpenter, 2007). During this period, norms were regarded as independent variables with their own explanatory power, perceived to possess an autonomous status, exerting a direct and dominant influence over various aspects of international political dynamics (Klotz, 1995b; Finnemore, 1996a; Katzenstein, 1996). Moreover, most of the early wave studies focusing on norm dynamics 'froze' the content of the norm being analysed (Bloomfield, 2016, p. 313)—

i.e., even as the process of diffusion was understood to be dynamic, the individual norm was comprehended as unchanging.

The second wave saw discourses on how normative (norm) change occurs, triggering new empirical research efforts as well as strong influence, for instance, from Wiener's argument that norms are always '[...] in principle contested' (2004, p. 200) or Acharya's argument that across global regions, the interpretation of norms differed and had the potential to be 'localized' (Acharya, 2004, 2013). This was largely witnessed from the early to mid-2000s (Peez, 2022). Scholars in this second wave were also intrigued by the normativity of emerging norms, and instead of assuming that the articulated standards of behaviour were inherently appropriate, they investigated the processes that rendered those norms suitable or fitting (Ralph, 2023). As such, this shift redirected the attention towards the significant role of agency—in the interpretation and contestation of norms: where norms were viewed as 'processes' and not 'things' (Ralph, 2023, p. 41). In the later phase of the first wave and particularly during the second wave, an emphasis on the significance of agency in the evolutionary processes of norms is noted. Therefore, the second wave of norm scholarship focuses on the interplay between structure, actors, and norms, highlighting the agency-structure debate (Hoffmann, 2010). Contemporary scholarship increasingly explores how these elements interact, mutually influence, and shape one another (Wunderlich, 2014).

In such landscape of norm research, certain models are seen prominent in these two waves, whether it be norm cascades, spirals, boomerangs or a process of argumentation, persuasion, and diffusion (Risse, 2000; Checkel, 2001; Badesu and Weiss, 2010), to name a few. Accordingly, norm cascades describe the pattern of a norm becoming increasingly accepted by the international community where it is legitimised and entrenched in international practices, further leading to a tipping point where the norm becomes a universal standard, accepted by almost all actors (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998). Norm spirals are social phenomena where actors incrementally adopt a behavior in a self-reinforcing way such that the norm goes through repression, denial, tactical concessions, prescription, and rule-consistent behavior (Risse-Kappen, Ropp and Sikkink, 1999). Boomerang effect occurs when the presence of descriptive norms (i.e., norms which guide social behavior by informing what other people do or don't do (Bergquist and Nilsson, 2019)) increases the likelihood of an undesirable behavior compared to its previous level (Scheutz, 2020).

These models were primarily concerned with explaining how norms influence both domestic and international outcomes (Nadelmann, 1990; Klotz, 1995a; Finnemore, 1996a). While they may account for how norms and normative systems influence outcomes, they do not fully capture the dynamic nature of norms, the processes and mechanisms through which norms evolve and their interaction with each other (Krook and True, 2012; Sandholtz, 2017), or even further, how norms are influenced because of the role of actors within broader normative systems.

The third wave in scholarly research, therefore, witnessed the emergence of innovative approaches to understanding norm dynamics that went beyond for instance, Finnemore and Sikkink's "life cycle" (1998) from the first wave, or the conventional understanding of "core-periphery and global-local norm dynamics" prevalent in the second wave (Stefan, 2017, p. 92). Instead, processes of "translation" began to be explored (see Boesenecker and Vinjamuri, 2011; Zwingel, 2012; Brake and Katzenstein, 2013; Bettiza and Dionigi, 2015)—where the direction in which norms propagate is not predetermined but can occur in upward, downward, or sideways trajectories (Brake and Katzenstein, 2013, p. 729). These approaches included explorations of "norm change" and "norm evolution," which provided fresh insights into the processes through which norms develop and transform (Kelley, 2008; Sandholtz, 2008a, 2017; Peez, 2022). Further, translation was observed as a 'chameleonic term'—a concept constantly changing its own meaning and, therefore, 'in motion' (Draude, 2017, p. 589). Translation highlights the essentiality of actively receiving a norm, engaging in contextual re-interpretation, and the consequent dynamics that contribute to the norm change of global norms (Draude, 2017).

One of many reasons why translation becomes important in the third wave of norms research, is because of the innovation it brings to the comprehension of norms—when the first wave stressed the agent-structure 'problem' as socially constructed—noting the absence of a single, immediately compelling conceptualisation of the agent-structure relation leading to complex interpretations of norms (Wendt, 1987, p. 338), the second wave addressed that actors are inherently intertwined with their social structure and cannot fully detach themselves from it to form independent judgments—implying that reasoning about norms or reasoning through norms has consequences (Hoffmann, 2010). The agent-structure assumptions in the second wave changed fundamentally in the third wave because of the adoption of the concept of 'translation' highlighting the structural power wielded by translators, their interests, and objectives, and the resulting translation outcomes (Draude, 2017). Thus, norm change began

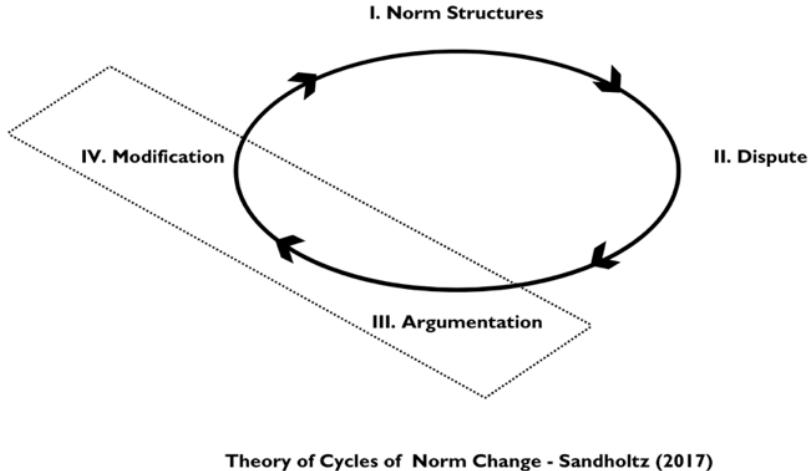
to be comprehended differently. Draude (2017, p. 600) emphasises thus the third wave embodies the “co-presence of different normative meanings, of the imperative of context-related re-interpretation, and the normality of norm change.” Translation was adding perspectives to the global norm dynamics.

Two key concepts of norm dynamics which was initially developed in the second wave (i.e., contestation and localisation), was further built upon in the third wave (Björkdahl and Gusic, 2015; Wolff and Zimmermann, 2016; Zimmermann, 2016; Lantis and Bloomberg, 2018; Lantis and Wunderlich, 2018; Stimmer and Wisken, 2019). Here, inherent dynamism of international norms—i.e., norm change and adaptation beyond their initial establishment; brought ‘innovation’ in comprehending broader normative systems (Sandholtz, 2017). Furthermore, the second wave did not eclipse the first, nor did the third wave replace the previous two; instead, all three waves overlap—collectively contributing to the comprehension of the evolving nature of contemporary norms research (Orchard and Wiener, 2024).

2.1.2 The Theory on Cycles of Norm Change

The Theory on *Cycles of Norm Change* (Sandholtz, 2017) focuses on the dynamics within normative systems where both the role of the actor championing global norms and the action of the global norms amongst each other can be comprehended through its cycles. I shall base my research on this theoretical framework as it conceptualises different global norms and how they co-exist¹⁰ as well as how their contestation and change is contingent on actors, for instance, norm champions, entrepreneurs, or antipreneurs. The focus in this study will be on the third stage—argumentation, the fourth stage—modification (i.e., norm change) of global norms cycle, and the transition between these two stages.

¹⁰ As to how they co-exist in norm clusters and norm constellations, for instance.



Theory of Cycles of Norm Change - Sandholtz (2017)

Figure. 2.1: Theory on Cycles of Norm Change, inspired by Sandholtz (2017) - (created by Susan Ann Samuel)

The research, by employing this theoretical framework, places itself in conversation with other innovative literatures of the third wave of norm research in Constructivism—where translation of global norms are explored to go multi-directional, i.e., the direction in which norms propagate is not predetermined but can occur in upward, downward, or sideways trajectories (Brake and Katzenstein, 2013, p. 729). However, a targeted view on specific stages in the norm change as well as the transition from one stage to another aims in broadening the scope of existing norm literature to align to the implications of the translation of the global norms.

Norms undergo a dynamic process of transformation as actors engage in ongoing debates concerning their interpretation and application, giving rise to the evolution of norms through repeated cycles of application and contestation, occasionally leading to the emergence of entirely new norms (Sandholtz, 2017; Deitelhoff and Zimmermann, 2020). Further the inherent conflict between global norms trigger disputes that generate argumentation, thereby resulting in modifications and adaptations of the rules themselves through successive cycles of interaction (Sandholtz, 2007)—such cycles have been earlier observed by Giddens (1986) and Sweet (1999) in their literatures, but further conceptualised by Sandholtz (2007, p. 11).

In the third wave, significant models came forward trying to capture the multidirectional diffusion of norms (Brake and Katzenstein, 2013), as well as comprehending the innovative practice of translation of global norms (see Boesenecker and Vinjamuri, 2011; Zwingel, 2012;

Bettiza and Dionigi, 2015). For instance, two models are noted here as examples, from amongst various other models in the third wave. Acharya, introduced the theoretical model of, norm circulation—studying the dual process of norm creation and diffusion (2013). In this framework, global norms introduced by transnational moral actors undergo a process of contestation and localisation to align with the cognitive perspectives of local actors—where a feedback loop is created between the local and the global contexts—where locally constructed norm and the global norm mutually reinforce each other, through the principle of subsidiarity. Further, Kreuder-Sonnen and Zürn, (2020, p. 241) builds on the ‘interface conflict framework’—a model of norm collisions, that builds from as well distinguishes itself from fragmentation framework in international law and regime complexity framework in international relations—zooms into the micro-level examination of conflicts arising between actors who uphold divergent positions based on the justification of incompatible global norms. This brings fresh insights on how different norms, institutions, and authorities are coordinated in international institutions.

However, these two models, as well as others¹¹ fail to capture what the Sandholtz model on *Cycles of Norm Change* explore. When norm circulation model captures feedback mechanism and mutual reinforcement of global and local norms—it fails to comprehend norm dynamics within a global normative system (for instance, global norms shaped by political discourses in the negotiations). When interface conflict framework investigates the interaction of global norms within an institutional design through an interdisciplinary lens—it overtly looks on conflicts, how overlaps and norm collisions occur during conflicts. The Theory on *Cycles of Norm Change* highlights specifically on the global norms, where its various interaction in the normative space can be studied. As such, helping to answer targeted questions on negotiations and negotiators with respect to international climate negotiations.

2.1.3 The Four Stages

The Theory on *Cycles of Norm Change* identifies four stages (Sandholtz, 2017). In the first stage, the focus lies on—*norm structures*, whereby States and other international actors employ an established set of norms to rationalise their actions and assess the behaviour of others in accordance with prevailing norms (Sandholtz, 2017). Norms function within broader normative frameworks, characterised by the coexistence of multiple norms or norm structures that can

¹¹ See norm cooperation (Pacheco, Santos and Chalub, 2007), theory on collective acceptance, where collectively accepted social norms and performativity is conceptualised (Okamoto, 2020), and so on

potentially clash with one another. Nevertheless, in the face of such challenges, there is often a recognition of broader normativity and institutionalisation (Lantis and Wunderlich, 2022)—leading to the emergence of networks that provide a platform for advocacy. This is particularly relevant for transnational advocacy networks, for instance, in climate movements (see Hadden and Jasny, 2019) in social movements for women rights (Kim, 2022) or rallying outcries for Responsibility to Protect (Lanz, 2011), to name a few.

The second stage—*dispute*; is when particular norms within the present normative framework are challenged, either due to disputes over their interpretation or clashes between existing norms, or between established norms and practices that were previously not seen through the normative lens (Sandholtz, 2017). For example, according to Krook and True (2012) and Sandholtz (2007) there are two types of tensions that arise when actors attempt to apply norms to specific situations. First, the conflict between norms that are inherently broader than the circumstances they are intended to govern, whereas the second is the clash between different norms that could potentially be applicable to the same issue or action. In such situations, conflicting rules or sets of rules are inevitable (Kratochwil, 1989b; Schachter, 1991; Lowe, 2001). For instance, international human rights standards may clash with norms of non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries (Sandholtz, 2017). Further, research on norm contestation reveals that ‘all normative structures generate dispute’ (Sandholtz, 2008a, p. 105) and that ‘renewed battles’ (Van Kersbergen and Verbeek, 2007, p. 219) of the meaning of international norms even after they are established, is inherent (Niemann and Schillinger, 2017). The inherent nature of norm is that they are contested and that norms are a disputed ‘contingent outcome’ (Renner, 2013, p. 19)—hence disputes are important in norm diffusion.

Nisbett and Spaiser (2023) describe how the normative discourse of the youth climate activists permeates the global climate politics discourse around the annual UNFCCC conferences. This usually happens when there is a dispute—when the status quo is challenged. In their work, the emphasis was placed on the advocacy of transnational youth climate movements, who promoted a normative framework centred on climate justice. Within this framework, there was a focus on the duty of care for child protection and the responsibility to safeguard climate change victims in the Global South.¹² These efforts were underpinned by a shared reference to

¹² Although the thesis do not separate the countries of the globe into a binary; for analytical simplicity, the term *Global South* is used where necessary to depict a broad descriptor for countries historically referred to as “developing,” “underdeveloped,” “least developed” or “Third World,” denoting states and populations with

human rights and anti-fossil fuel norms, amongst other global norms. This framework resonated strongly with various stakeholders at COP24, COP25 and was referenced at COP26 (Nisbett and Spaiser, 2023).¹³ Furthermore, in climate politics, it is crucial to consider the influence of the actors who have an advantage in shaping norm development (Gunningham, 2017)—as in the case of norm entrepreneurs, who challenge the status quo to evoke new norms (see Mendez and Houghton, 2020; Loen and Gloppen, 2021) or norm champions, who advocate for new norms (Green, 2018a; Blondeel, Colgan and Van de Graaf, 2019).¹⁴

The third stage is *argumentation*. To emerge victorious in a dispute, an actor need contributes to ‘arguing’ or persuading even when the actor’s detractors will make a contrary argument. Therefore, the debates are normative, even though the outcomes in question may entail tangible benefits. Actors, disputing the (normative) status quo (for instance, often norm entrepreneurs), as well as actors defending it (often norm antipreneurs), are meant to argue for their position and persuade others. When argumentation encompasses successful lobbying and advocacies through networks on the domestic level, it changes government positions in negotiations (Rietig, 2016). For example, women’s suffrage movements, where governments began recognising women’s right to vote (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998, p. 895; Murdie, 2018) or norm champions who pioneer new norms for phasing out of fossil fuels (Green, 2018a, p. 105), for instance the European Green Deal that aims to make Europe climate neutral by 2050 (Kazak, 2020; Chiti, 2022). At the international level INGOs and transnational advocacy groups/networks engage in argumentation. Power plays an important role at this stage. In comparison to their opponents, who may be influential states or industries, norm entrepreneurs from transnational advocacy networks, such as grassroots activists, generally possess limited instrumental power (i.e., direct control over other actors) or structural power (i.e., power that emanates from their relative position). But Gunningham, (2017) suggests that norm entrepreneurs often have an edge in terms of discursive power, as they can leverage moral principles to their advantage. What constitutes widespread support for a new normative framework, however, may vary and may occur in several stages. It may begin with support from influential actors and then extend to others through ripple effects (Sandholtz, 2017).

comparatively lower levels of prosperity and global influence (See Natarajan, 2021a; Anghie, 2023; Ann Samuel, 2026a).

¹³ See *Chapter 4: Global Norms and International Climate Negotiations*

¹⁴ Norm entrepreneurs and norm champions will be further discussed in detail later in this chapter.

The fourth, and the final stage in Sandholtz's *Cycle on Norm Change* involves—*norm change*, of existing norms in response to the normative arguments put forth during the third stage, depending on the level of support that the competing actors were able to generate (Sandholtz, 2017). The direction of change depends on the emergence of broad support in favour of one interpretation of the norm(s) over others. The relevant actors vary from one kind of dispute to the other, and there is no a priori standard for what constitutes broad support. However, if the status quo norm(s) obtains broad support, it remains in place but strengthened, while if an alternative interpretation gains broad support, the normative structure is modified. These modification results through argumentation (the third stage). Hence, the modification outcome can manifest as either the strengthening of existing norms, the adoption of new norms, or the alteration of existing norms in relation to their meaning and applicability. Albeit such norm change can be effectively institutionalised through the establishment of legal documents and agreements, for modified and/or new norms to effectively shape behaviour—internalisation must also occur through relevant actors—Involving the integration of norms into the beliefs, values, and practices of individuals and groups. It is important to note that the extent and nature of broad support for these modified and/or new norms can vary significantly (Sandholtz, 2017). Norm change can also be a relatively straightforward process of learning, involving imitation and accelerated by persuasion and the sharing of information (Checkel, 1997; Price, 1998, p. 617; Elgström, 2000). For example, in the realm of human rights, both domestic and transnational activist networks can play a significant role in shaping international norms by framing persuasive arguments (Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Brysk, 2000; Wallbott and Schapper, 2017). Also, Winston (2018) notes how Finnemore and Sikkink, (1998), as well as Krasner (1983), acknowledge that modification of the norms can happen when institutions and regimes undergo transformation over time. However, the existing literatures does not provide a definitive answer as to whether these changes involve the emergence of entirely new norms or modifications/change to existing norms. While there is a clear connection between the processes of norm change and institutional change, the specific mechanisms through which norms evolve within institutions and regimes have not been fully addressed in the literature dedicated to these topics.

2.2. Norm Clusters and Constellations

The examination of the interaction between various norms is crucial in international politics, despite single norms being often the normative components that are both developed and contested at any given time (Lantis and Wunderlich, 2022). However, in complex, multi-

dimensional contexts, such as the climate crisis, several norms are disputed and several new norms are introduced simultaneously (Nisbett and Spaiser, 2023) and it is, therefore, useful to look at how norms are interconnected forming norm clusters and norm constellations. This subsection will be divided into two parts—exploring what norm clusters and norm constellations are, and what they can mean in the context of climate change.

2.2.1. Norm Clusters

In order for a normative argument to succeed, the suggested modifications/change to existing norms or the introduction of new norms must align with established and widely endorsed norms (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni and Bondaroff, 2014). This is important especially in the third and fourth phases in the Theory on *Cycles of Norm Change* (Sandholtz, 2017)—where even when specific predictions according to the predictive theory of norm change fail, broader expectations can be offered, as to how argumentations may prevail and the outcome of norm change. That is, how outcome of norm disputes and arguments invariably leads to modifications of the norms, resulting in “making them stronger or weaker, clearer (or more ambiguous), more specific (or less), broader (or narrower)” (Sandholtz, 2017, p. 10).

Although scholars have observed and researched on how norms are embedded in interconnected normative systems (Florini, 1996, p. 376; Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998, p. 897; Grillot, 2011, p. 534; Percy, 2019, p. 126; Fehl and Rosert, 2020), the research on norm complexity (i.e., norm relations and norm interactions) have only been selectively researched (Fehl and Rosert, 2020). Further, even though there is literature on how emerging norms are accommodated (or not) by the older norms (see Checkel, 1999; Farrell, 2001; Acharya, 2004; Cortell and Davis, 2005; Capie, 2008; Subotic, 2015; Zimmermann, 2017; Fehl and Rosert, 2020; Girard, 2021) and how norms interact between the broader normative structure and adjacent norms (see Florini, 1996; Thomas, 2000; Carpenter, 2005; Kim and Sharman, 2014; Großklaus, 2017; Rhoads and Welsh, 2019), the literature on how norms interact with each other is only being progressively developed.

Norms do not exist in isolation, rather they interact with other norms, either in a reinforcing or conflicting way and, thus, in such interconnected linkages—norm clusters emerge—further, situating themselves within broader frameworks that offer them backing and resiliency (Fehl, 2018; Lantis and Wunderlich, 2018; Fehl and Rosert, 2020). According to Lantis and Wunderlich, the concept of "norm clusters" refers to a collection of norms or principles that are aligned with each other and interconnected in terms of addressing a shared issue area

(Lantis and Wunderlich, 2018, p. 576). For instance, global norms of labour standards exhibit a strong alignment with human rights norms, while their compatibility with norms of free trade is relatively limited (Fehl and Rosert, 2020). Norm clusters refer to assemblages of interconnected yet distinct norms or principles that occupy a central position within a regime. Scholars in the field of norms have shown a growing interest in exploring larger configurations of multiple norms that exhibit associations with each other—where norms occur in ‘bundles’ (Betts and Orchard, 2014; Bloomfield, 2016, p. 3), ‘clusters’ (Lantis and Wunderlich, 2018; Winston, 2018), ‘sets’ (Capie, 2008; Kelley, 2008, p. 225; Zimmermann, 2016, p. 100), ‘complexes’ (Moore, 2012, p. 33; Simmons and Jo, 2019), as ‘complex norms’ (Welsh, 2013), ‘configurations’ (Evers, 2020, p. 221), ‘super-norm’ (Fukuda-Parr and Hulme, 2011), or ‘adjacent norms’ (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998, p. 908; Wiener, 2018, p. 60)—albeit they appear in different terminologies, they occur in largely similar contexts. In relation to such research, scholars posit that all norms originate within and become integrated into broader normative “neighbourhoods” or ideational structures (Lantis and Wunderlich, 2022, p. 8). The network of global norms is progressively becoming denser as states consistently embrace new legal instruments, supplementary protocols, and amendments to existing conventions (Weiner, 1998, p. 438; Goldstein, Rivers and Tomz, 2007, p. 44; Hurrell and Macdonald, 2013, p. 58; Pratt, 2018, p. 564; Zürn, Faude and Kreuder-Sonnen, 2018; Fehl and Rosert, 2020). These clusters encompass multiple norms that exhibit varying degrees of cohesion, institutionalisation, and legalisation, which serve to insulate them from challenges of contestation (Lantis and Wunderlich, 2018). As of now, these endeavours have yielded over 560 multilateral treaties (United Nations, n.d) and, in a broader sense, approximately 75,000 international organisations (IOs) (Union of International Associations, 2025)—further complemented by informal agreements, regulations formulated by IOs, and frameworks that facilitate the translation of international norms into regional, national, and local contexts (Fehl and Rosert, 2020).

According to Winston, (2018) individual norms accommodate themselves into norm clusters, and they are comprised of three essential components: problems, values, and behaviours. They encompass diverse configurations of interrelated yet distinct values and behaviours, presenting multiple viable approaches to interconnected and overlapping challenges—giving rise to variations in the adoption and adherence to norms (Winston, 2018, p. 638). Winston substantiates the deduction of the three components of norms by analysing the works of Wiener, (2008, 2014) and Wendt, (1999); where they argue that norms serve two essential

functions—constitutive and constraint. The constitutive function involves the creation of categories for actors and actions, shaping collective understandings of their meaning. Norms also assign value to certain items, whether tangible (for e.g., carbon-foot print) or intangible (e.g., accountability, transparency or reconciliation), which then define problems based on their alignment or misalignment with societal values (Wendt, 1999). Problematisation occurs when a fact is perceived as negatively affecting the attainment or continuation of something valued, necessitating corrective behaviour (see Carpenter, 2007; Winston, 2018). Norms also have a constraint function—providing acceptable justifications for behaviour. When states seek to address a defined problem, the legitimacy and appropriateness of their actions depend on public justifications rooted in widely held values. Pure self-interest is seldom used as a basis for justification, as actions are typically framed within the context of shared values (Risse, 2000). The acceptance and legitimacy of an action rely, in part, on the extent to which external actors believe in the causal story behind it and its potential to effectively operationalise the given value, thus addressing the problem at hand. Furthermore, the value that identifies a problem also sets boundaries on the range of behaviours deemed appropriate for its resolution. Therefore, constitutive and the constraint functions of norm-building determines “appropriate behaviour” (Hurrell and Macdonald, 2013, p. 61)—encompassing how norm clusters accommodate different combinations of norms to perform desired behaviour and withstand contestation. Further, focusing on norm linkages emphasizes how the synergies between norms work, particularly in norm clusters or neighbourhoods, as they can serve as a source of legitimisation (Fehl, 2018) or exhibit “permissive effects” that norms have on each other (Rosert, 2019a). In a norm cluster, various norms consisting of expressing various problems, values, and behaviours can be merged to create different but acceptable combinations, depending on contextual factors. Each combination (“norm”) is deemed a suitable approach to address the overarching problem that leads to the adoption of the norm cluster. Also, norm clusters provide an ambit for the study of contestation over norm meanings and primacy, and contemporary studies have explored how even complementary norms in practice could clash when applied in specific circumstances (Rhoads and Welsh, 2019; Staunton and Ralph, 2020).

Norm clusters promise resiliency when faced with contestation (Lantis and Wunderlich, 2018, 2022)—Lantis and Wunderlich stress (2018, p. 576). Two key attributes that contribute to such resiliency. Firstly, the interconnectivity/cohesiveness—providing a measure of ontological security for its members (Hurd, 2014) and synergy among individual norms, and secondly, the degree of institutionalisation and legal framework established of a norm cluster. Norm

contestation can arise when norms are seen as outdated, unjust, or ineffective, or when they clash with new interests or values. The outcome of norm contestation can be the modification or replacement of existing norms. The extent of contestation surrounding a norm does not necessarily indicate its strength, which is determined by its validity and applicability to the actions of norm addressees (Deitelhoff and Zimmermann, 2020). Further, the legitimisation of a new component or combination within the norm cluster depends on how the community accepts it and decides on it (Winston, 2018). For instance, Kratchowil argues that decision-making may seem uncertain when viewed at an individual level, but once actions are categorised, the decision-making process becomes more understandable (2001). It needs to be understood that norm clusters emerge, grow and change (Winston, 2018). In addition, different, conflicting norms may imply different “appropriate” behaviours. Where there are ‘a lot of acceptable options for “appropriate behaviour”’ (Winston, 2018, p. 639), as it becomes imperative to comprehend the conceptual structure of contemporary international norms where either their stability or flexibility creates conflict. Such conflict leads to a lack of consolidation regarding the evolution, diffusion, and impact of norms, and in some cases, an inability to come to a consensus on the content of certain norms, even though, norms can also reinforce each other and build stabilising clusters. Yet, conflicts within norm clusters are observed to induce policy stalemates (Harris and Symons, 2013).

2.2.1.1 How are Norms Connected in a Norm Cluster?

Lantis and Wunderlich observe norm clusters as a collection of interconnected norms or principles that share alignment and relevance to a specific issue area (2018, p. 576). In line with the concept of norm bundles (True and Wiener, 2019), norm clusters consist of distinct sets of interconnected normative meanings that may or may not align completely (Lantis and Wunderlich, 2018). Similarly, Evers, (2020, p. 221) explores the connection between norms and practice theory, conceptualising norms as part of normative configurations characterised by a network of discrete norms linked through shared social practices. Scholars argue that these normative neighbourhoods often provide implicit and explicit support for the activation of specific norms within clusters. In favourable circumstances, norms can be reinforced by the presence of closely held principles and related normative structures. In more contentious situations or when faced with challenges, actors may reinforce norms by taking actions that strengthen or reaffirm the broader cluster of norms (Florini, 1996; Krook and True, 2012; Lantis and Wunderlich, 2018).

Comprehension of norm clusters build upon a longstanding tradition of implicit or indirect allusions to interconnections among norms over several decades (see Florini, 1996; Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998; Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Müller and Wunderlich, 2013; Betts *et al.*, 2014; Hofmann, 2015; True and Wiener, 2019)—whether it be collections of similar, interwoven norms (e.g., Lantis and Bloomberg, 2018; True and Wiener, 2019) or how similarly situated norms evoke conflicts (Fehl, 2018; Fehl and Rosert, 2020) or how collisions amongst norms instigate actors' behaviour (Harris and Symons, 2013; Gholiagha, Holzscheiter and Liese, 2020).

Lantis and Wunderlich (2022) observes three theme-based norm connectedness. Firstly—*dimensionality* of norm clusters, conceptualising norm clusters as dimensional exo-structures enabling observers to grasp the evolution of normative ideas and their role in providing ontological security (Hunt and Orchard, 2020). This can be the outcome of how the norms have been developed, for instance international negotiations figuring solutions to global solutions (Lantis and Wunderlich, 2022), or as norm entrepreneurs how frame according to normative principles (Lantis and Wunderlich, 2018, p. 572). Secondly—*dynamics* of norms that bind them in a normative framework, whether it pertains to the complexity or density of norm clusters, which consist of collections of norms, shared normative meanings, and other ideational phenomena (see Müller and Wunderlich, 2013; Fehl, 2018)—guiding actors to determine behavioural choices (Tiemessen, 2011). Thirdly—*agents and processes of norm contestation* are discussed. This approach acknowledges the involvement of various actors who engage in discursive or behavioural contestation of norms. Lantis and Wunderlich (2022) observes that contestation—whether it be behavioural or discursive (which is more seen in institutional debates), primarily arises in amongst norm clusters when significant actors question the legitimacy or prominence of specific norm interpretations within a norm cluster in comparison to others (Stimmer and Wisken, 2019; Deitelhoff and Zimmermann, 2020; Fehl and Rosert, 2020).

However, (Fehl and Rosert, 2020) identifies norm complexes where collection of norms are observed to connect. It can be *norm families*—which are characterised by shared values and problem descriptions, encompass multiple compatible norms that establish connections between these values (such as individual rights) and problems (such as civilian suffering in warfare), offering various behavioural prescriptions. Or *norm packages*—where sets of norms are clustered through political negotiations, without necessarily sharing a common heritage in terms of values and problem descriptions. Or, *norm agglomeration*—where norms are shared

by the same actors, yet without belonging to the same family of being tied to one another in a negotiated package (Fehl and Rosert, 2020). For instance, Búzás and Terman (2019) have led the way in this area of research by examining "normative clusters" within the realm of human rights—focusing on the public endorsement of various human rights standards in the UN Periodic Review by different actors.¹⁵

2.2.1.2 Relevance of Norm Clusters in Climate Change Politics?

The analysis of global norms on climate change involves exploring how various norm clusters, such as human rights and intergenerational justice, are linked with 'aligned but distinct norms' (Lantis and Wunderlich, 2018, p. 570; Hofmann and Suthanthiraraj, 2019); to promote resilience in the face of contestation (Lantis and Wunderlich, 2022). This approach highlights the meanings, legitimacy, and impact of norms as they diffuse and interact within wider norm constellations. For instance, the incorporation of human rights norms within the climate discourse has been lacking for an extended period (Wallbott and Schapper, 2017, pp. 219–222). However, there has been a recent shift with prominent human rights non-governmental organisations (NGOs) increasingly engaging in climate negotiations (Schapper, 2018, pp. 49–50). Further, Nisbett and Spaiser, (2023) observed how youth climate movements employed interconnections between norms and norm clusters, framing their normative assertions on human rights and the duty of care for children's protection (see Spaiser, Nisbett and Stefan, 2021). Further, reinforcing the existing anti-fossil fuel norms with norms on duty of care—stressing that the persistence of a fossil-fuel dependent economy is incompatible with the responsibility of safeguarding the well-being of children and other victims of climate change. Hence norms were seen to cluster together because of a moral argument.

2.2.2 Norm Constellations

The norm clusters are themselves part of larger norm structures or networks, with several interlinked norm clusters forming 'constellations'—such a platform of meta-governance constitutes the widest dimension in global norms politics (Lantis and Wunderlich, 2022). Adopting a third-dimensional perspective allows us to examine the intricate connections between international law, politics, regime complexes, and meta-organising principles, which

¹⁵ They conceptualise normative clusters as collectives of actors who share similar norms, rather than collections of norms themselves. Additionally, they emphasise that each identified normative cluster (such as "civil libertarians" or "developmentalists") adheres to a distinct combination of human rights norms (Fehl and Rosert, 2020).

collectively contribute to the remarkable resilience of the system. This lens enables us to understand how global norms interact and form synapses that shape and sustain the global order (Sandholtz, 2008b; Wiener, 2014; Brunnée and Toope, 2017, 2019; Lantis and Wunderlich, 2022).

Norm constellations refer to the complex systems of norms and values that exist in a particular context or domain, which may encompass multiple norm clusters. These constellations can be influenced by a variety of factors, such as power relations, cultural differences, and historical legacies, which can shape how norms are created, implemented, and contested. Essentially, norm constellations are a way of describing the diverse and interconnected set of norms that exist within a given social, political, or economic system, and how they interact with each other to shape behaviour and outcomes. Understanding norm constellations can be useful in identifying how norms are embedded in broader social, economic, and political structures and how they are influenced by a range of actors and interests. The concept of norm constellations opens the literature primarily to the three-dimensional norm research program (Lantis and Wunderlich, 2022) studying the normative architecture and its key structural component—recognising that norm dynamics operate in complexity and multidimensionality where individual/single norms, norm clusters and meta-governance structures like norm constellations, are closely intertwined with agency. Meta-governance structures are dynamic constellations that evolve gradually by integrating and interconnecting diverse norms and norm clusters, forming new combinations of existing normative meanings. They play a dual role in the international institutional order. Primarily in two ways, firstly, they are *constitutive*, determining the scope of governance and the relevant actors, and secondly, they are *procedural*, guiding the approach to addressing global challenges and specifying the appropriate procedures (Müller and Wunderlich, 2013).

In the broader landscape of normative constellations, overarching meta-norms in the macro-level exert influence on individual norms at the micro level as well as norm clusters at the meso-level, thereby bestowing legitimacy upon the entire normative framework. The emergence and evolution of the micro-, meso-, and macro-approach in the study of normative phenomena is rooted in the sociological field. In this regard, I acknowledge that the presence of comprehensive normative structures plays a crucial role in conferring legitimacy upon individual norms and norm clusters operating at the micro- and meso-levels of global politics (Müller and Wunderlich, 2013, p. 24) However, this should not be confused with the macro-, meso- and micro- models that Rosert introduces where she depicts them as models of norm

research (Rosert, 2019b). Accordingly, macro-level models provide a comprehensive framework that encompasses the complete life cycle of a norm (for eg., in, Nadelmann, 1990; Florini, 1996; Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998). In contrast, meso-level models focus on specific phases within this life cycle, such as norm regression (McKeown, 2009), erosion (Rosert and Schirmbeck, 2007), signalling model (Hyde, 2011) or interactive translation model (Zimmermann, 2017). Furthermore, micro-level models delve into the sub-phases that constitute these broader phases, such as the initial adoption of an issue by norm entrepreneurs or the final negotiations within an institutional context (see Deitelhoff, 2009; Holzscheiter, 2010). Nevertheless, it is imperative to understand how these models posits unique interactions within normative constellations. For instance, one example can be that the micro-model of persuasion in the advocacy of anti-fossil fuel norms in international climate negotiations, can influence in the resiliency and stability of a norm cluster for climate justice—for instance, combining norms of intergenerational justice, equity, duty or care and human rights, to name a few.

This is why norm constellations as the third dimension of normative analysis, showcases the implications of “governance of governance” (Jessop, 2011)—emphasising normative connectedness and interwovenness (Lantis and Wunderlich, 2022, p. 18). Hence, such a perspective adopts a progressive outlook by acknowledging the potential for convergence and constructive interrelations among norms, institutions, and interactions that aim to enhance ontological security for the global community as a whole (Vieira, 2016; Hewitt and Davies, 2020). The broader normative architecture of meta governance where norm constellations exist—similar to discussions on regime complexes—acknowledges that actors often shape their preferences and make decisions within a particular institution while being influenced by other interconnected institutions within the complex (Gehring and Faude, 2013). Further, the complex and multi-layered nature of the governance architecture where norm constellations exists also showcase possibilities for transnational mobilization (Zajak, 2017, pp. 125–126; Holzscheiter, Gholiagha and Liese, 2022)—where the relevance of actors or the importance of agency in shaping and re-shaping norm structures in micro-, meso-, and macro- levels of meta-governance is explored.

2.3 Norm Entrepreneurs, Norm Champions, and Norm Antipreneurs

There is a growing body of literature that highlights the significance of actors and agency in the dynamics of norms. To comprehend norm evolution, diffusion, and dynamics, it is

necessary to grasp how the initially fuzzy and floating norms in terms of definitions and boundaries, undergo institutionalization, negotiation, acceptance, and internalization—for which agency and social structure becomes key. However, the ongoing debate between agency and structure¹⁶ within constructivism and norm research remains unresolved—with a tendency to prioritise the examination of structural factors in international politics and norm emergence, often overshadowing the role of agency (Jakobsson, 2018). Some scholars argue that this inclination to focus exclusively on either structure or agency is paradoxical within the constructivist framework, given that most constructivists are interested in understanding the interplay between actors and their surrounding context/structures (Adler, 2013). Constructivism aims to explore the process of political development and acknowledges that this process involves a constant interplay between actors and structures, intentions, and context—that is, will an actor behave on her own or will she be dictated by the context that surrounds her? While it is common for many constructivists to assert that structures predominantly determine outcomes, it is also pertinent for them to emphasize that the social world is mutually constituted by the interplay of agency and structure (Wendt, 1987; Sending, 2002; Bucher, 2014; Jakobsson, 2018).

The plea to reintegrate agency into the analysis is not novel (see Klotz, 1995c; Checkel, 1998) but it appears to have resurfaced and garnered renewed momentum in recent times (Müller and Wunderlich, 2013; Acharya, 2014; Bucher, 2014). According to Hays, agency can be conceptualized in four different ways, each representing varying degrees of human (actor's) choice and control—constituting values and behaviour. Firstly, individuals as agents who simply carry or embody social structures. Secondly, that people both shape and are shaped by structures through their everyday actions and choices. Thirdly, that agency in terms of making choices have transformative effects on the nature of social structures. Finally, the fourth perspective envisions agency as complete control over the social world, with limitations primarily imposed by biology and limited natural resources (Hays, 1994, p. 62). Hence when the anthropocene meets the need for accountability in curbing the climate crisis—normative questions arise.

¹⁶ See Hays, (1994) unpacks what (social) structures can be—"institution" (Gusfield, 1984), relations between states, between classes, and between state and class (Skocpol, 1979), material circumstances (Berger, 1981), economy and the state (Bellah *et al.*, 1986), "political instruments", "institutions," and the "power element" (Geertz, 1977, pp. 331, 337), or the system of "production" (Willis, 1977).

Under normative questions with respect to climate change (and international norm dynamics with respect to climate negotiations), emphasis remains in the transformative agency that challenges, contests, and/or reinforces the structure (i.e., the global context). There are always limitations for transformative action, which involves challenging the existing framework of action and actively working to change it (Virkkunen, 2006, p. 49; Haapasaari, Engeström and Kerosuo, 2016, p. 233) however transformative agency will amount to individual as well as collective actions “that affect the pattern of social structures in some empirically observable way” (Hays, 1994, pp. 63–64).

2.3.1 Norm Entrepreneurs

The main agents of change in the context of normative change, are norms entrepreneurs and norm champions. Norm entrepreneurs are actors who change a norm, contest, or introduce a new one, because their perception of existing norms is inadequate and/or unjust. Moreover, they alert people to the existence of a shared complaint/concern and suggests a collective solution (Sunstein, 1996). Norm entrepreneurs can be individuals, states, or other societal actors (Ingebritsen, 2002)—evoking new ideas, norms, and conversations into policy debates, thereby changing the terms and nature of the discourses, moreover, promoting norm implementation through pressuring (or even persuasion) and monitoring (Keck and Sikkink, 1998). Norm entrepreneurs apply pressure from both transnational and domestic levels (Brysk, 1993, 2000). It is widely agreed that transnational advocacy networks and groups, play an important role as norm entrepreneurs in international norm change too (Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Bob, 2011; Risse, Ropp and Sikkink, 2013; Sandholtz, 2017; van Asselt and Green, 2022) often triggering normative change, and monitoring norm implementation—holding actors accountable to their commitments. Norms are not spontaneously generated, but rather deliberately constructed by individuals who hold firm beliefs about what constitutes acceptable or favourable behaviour.

In earlier literature on norms, norm entrepreneurs were commonly portrayed as actors operating primarily outside the direct policy sphere—such as epistemic communities, NGOs, and other interest groups. Their role was typically attributed to the initial phase of the norm life cycle (see Haas, 1992; Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998). However, more recent studies on norms have expanded the concept of norm entrepreneurs, suggesting that various types of actors can assume this role. Moreover, the boundaries regarding when and how entrepreneurs operate have become increasingly blurred. Several recent scholars have argued that agency is

significant at all stages of the norm evolution, adoption, and internalization processes (Björkdahl, 2008, 2013; Rushton, 2008; Fukuda-Parr and Hulme, 2011; Nay, 2012; Karlsrud, 2013; Müller and Wunderlich, 2013; Acharya, 2014). Further, the growing importance of norm entrepreneurship in climate action cannot be overlooked either (see Benwell, 2011; Braun, 2014; Ha-yoon, 2015; Heidrich and Nakonieczna-Bartosiewicz, 2021).

According to Finnemore and Sikkink ‘norm entrepreneurs’ need to persuade a critical mass of states to embrace new norms. First adopters of these new norms, norm champions, further attempt to socialise other states to become norm followers leading to ‘norm cascades’ (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998). Norm diffusion heavily depends on norm entrepreneurs, who have a critical function in introducing new norms or novel interpretations of existing norms, drawing attention to particular issues, and even creating them through the use of language that highlights, clarifies, and emphasises their importance (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998). Sandholtz, albeit doesn’t state explicitly the influence of norm entrepreneurs, his explanation of persuasion becomes of importance, in identifying norm entrepreneurs (and champions)—specifically in the third and fourth stages of argumentation and norm change (Sandholtz, 2017).

Therefore, a norm entrepreneur can also be described as a problem-solver who takes action to address a specific issue and as an agenda setter who introduces novel ideas into the discourse (Elgström, 2000; Björkdahl, 2007). The motivations of norm entrepreneurs will naturally differ, but various factors such as altruism, ideational commitment, and self-interest have been recognized as key driving forces—therefore, according to Price, (1998) the role of moral persuasion becomes of importance here. The process of moral persuasion facilitates the dissemination of norms, leading to shifts in preferences and interests, ultimately resulting in behavioural changes (Elgström, 2000, p. 459). Norm change, that is the fourth stage in (Sandholtz, 2017) *Cycles of Norm Change*, can also be a relatively straightforward process of learning, involving imitation and accelerated by persuasion and the sharing of information (Checkel, 1997; Price, 1998, p. 617; Elgström, 2000). Finnemore, (1996b) makes a distinction between learning and teaching. Learning is an internal process within an actor, whereas teaching involves external agents who actively engage in instructive activities. This role is often fulfilled by norm entrepreneurs believing in a moral argument. A such, the relevance of transformative agency becomes key.

For instance, during the women's suffrage and subsequent women's rights movements, suffragettes as norm entrepreneurs seeded new norms on women's role in the society within a

contentious normative environment where they had to contend with status quo norms and differing views on what was considered appropriate (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998; Murdie, 2018). Likewise, climate movements such as Fridays for Futures are challenging the status quo, i.e., fossil-fuel based business-as usual, by seeding new norms (e.g. anti-fossil fuel norms) or redefining existing ones (e.g. duty of care for children) (Spaiser, Nisbett and Stefan, 2022). This has been stressed by Nisbett and Spaiser, (2023) as the “moral power” transforming climate politics. Moreover, by expressing their solidarity with the Global South and being a movement that is present in the Global South as much as in the Global North, the climate movements also propagates climate justice norms that have been seeded by other climate movements (Bowman, 2020; Nakabuye, Nirere and Oladosu, 2020b; Spaiser, Nisbett and Stefan, 2022). Studies have demonstrated that social movements, functioning as norm entrepreneurs, can instigate normative transformation, which entails altering attitudes regarding what is deemed socially and ethically permissible. This change in attitudes can then stimulate more far-reaching social change, encompassing modifications in conduct, policies, and legislation (Sunstein, 1996; Khagram, Riker and Sikkink, 2002; Giugni, 2004; Woolley, 2015; Almeida, 2019; de la Sablonnière and Taylor, 2020). Despite lacking instrumental and structural power and facing massive mobilisation by norm-antipreneurs defending the fossil fuel status quo, youth climate activists possess significant discursive and moral power that enabled them to catalyse normative change through collaboration with other activists and norm champions. Maintaining the momentum and moral pressure and expanding outreach to more norm champions will be crucial in going forward (Nisbett and Spaiser, 2023). That is, for normative arguments to be effective, it is essential not only to possess persuasive arguments but also to gain the support of influential actors beyond the immediate norm entrepreneurs.

2.3.2 Norm Champions

In such a premise, Green, (2018) stresses the importance of ‘norm champions’—they are actors who play a critical role in the norm change, especially from the third to fourth stage of the *Cycles of Norm Change* (Sandholtz, 2017). Norm champions can be both state and/or non-state actors, utilizing domestic as well as international avenues for their actions. They can also be notable figures (e.g., COP presidents, public figures), or for-profit and non-profit organizations. They pioneer new norms introduced by norm entrepreneurs when virtually no one else does. Norm entrepreneurs must persuade a significant number of norm champions, who can serve as multipliers, for effective norm diffusion. For optimal effects, the ideal norm champions are connectors—actors who have many connections and ideally bridge different

groups of actors (Christakis and Fowler, 2011). Critical mass of norm adoption is more likely when norm entrepreneurs are able to recruit a range of different, influential, strategically well-placed norm champions. At the early stages, the new or changed norms are likely to diffuse from these norm champions to early adopters who share a common identity with them. Further to achieving critical mass, a cascade effect is triggered, usually by the norm entrepreneurs and norm champions leading to rapid adoption by most of the remaining actors, even those opposing the new norm. For instance, under the context of climate change—actors heavily reliant on fossil fuels still adopts environment friendly measures—this can be due to naming and shaming (Turner *et al.*, 2010; Petrova, 2019), political agency (O'Brien, 2015) or legal mechanisms (Higham *et al.*, 2021), to name a few. Norm entrepreneurs and norm champions frequently form connections through transnational advocacy networks, which actively advocate for normative change across various levels (Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Green, 2018a). Moreover, civil society and social movements can further influence late adopter countries towards norm adaptation, through substantial political effort and persistent pressure (Green, 2018a).

Further, norm champions accelerate social tipping points, by mobilising pride and shame (Mitchell and Carpenter, 2019; Petrova, 2019). In the early stages of norm development, it can be crucial to mobilize pride. Certain states, particularly those of smaller or middle-power status, actively pursue the role of norm champions within multilateral contexts, aiming to establish their identities as such. In return for their leadership and adherence to norms, these states often receive recognition and positive publicity from advocacy groups (Rutherford, Brem and Matthew, 2003; Brysk, 2009; Mitchell and Carpenter, 2019).¹⁷ In climate change context, the appeal of Small Island Developing States are driven by their unique circumstances to prioritise an "emergency" agenda in climate talks (Benwell, 2011, p. 200)—thereby championing various global norms in response to climate crisis.¹⁸

According to Petrova, (2019) mobilisation of shame exemplifies the concept of "negative altercasting" (Turner *et al.*, 2010, p. 2), where certain actors portray another actor as someone

¹⁷ See *Chapter 6: Norm Champions and Norm Antipreneurs*

¹⁸ See *Chapter 6: Norm Champions and Norm Antipreneurs* for further analysis on norm champions; and the role of SIDS as norm champions.

failing to uphold its professed values.¹⁹ To avoid being associated with such negative roles, the state/actor is compelled to comply with the demands of the altercaster. On the other hand, mobilisation of pride represents the notion of "positive altercasting." In this case, altercasters encourage states to take the lead in shaping norms, and to motivate reluctant states to participate as commendable members of the international community, reinforcing their commitment to newly adopted norms. Here, positive altercasting²⁰ play significant roles in negotiation dynamics, allowing participants to shift their focus from what they endure but as to what they achieve in the process. For actors who may otherwise be seen as disadvantaged in the negotiations, adopting the position of norm champions can be a strategic advantage. Positive altercasting aims to strengthen the identification of actors with the role of a norm champion, potentially contributing to the internalisation of norms. This is particularly true for actors who are actively involved in the negotiation and decision-making processes. However, the process of norm internalisation is rarely straightforward (Petrova, 2016).

Albeit, through the illustrative unpacking of Machiavelli's norm against mercenarism and the utility-based rationale underpinning it, (Fitzsimmons, 2009, p. 15) summarises well—stressing the importance of norm champions in making “bold decision to adopt and implement the new norm” on behalf of the wider international community—even at the risk of the norm failing, or diffusing further (Fitzsimmons, 2009, p. 15).

2.3.3 Norm Antipreneurs

Norm entrepreneurs and norm champions always operate in contested normative spaces, where actors defending the status quo—the ‘norm antipreneurs’ (Bloomfield, 2016) fight their efforts to trigger change. While norm entrepreneurs challenge the status quo to create new global norms or redefine existing ones, norm antipreneurs are those who dedicate significant efforts to impede normative change, defending the status quo (Bloomfield, 2016), thereby preventing norm modification (or norm change). They even do so by utilising counter-frames of moral arguments, that seek to rationalise contested practices (Seidman, 2015, p. 1033; Jamieson, 2017; Green, 2018a), for instance how the fossil-fuel industry posits such moral frames in the

¹⁹ In role theory, the concept of altercasting refers to the process of assigning and shaping identities and social roles onto others. This is typically done by treating them in a manner that aligns with the imposed identity or role (Thies, 2009).

²⁰ The author couples positive altercasting with cooperative compromise—where resistant actors have a possibility for cooperative interaction to emerge. In this interaction, participants are granted equal status and work together towards finding a shared solution, even if it is not achieved through persuasion alone. A shared solution would amount to compromises, which happens a lot in negotiations (Petrova, 2019).

context of rising advocacy of anti-fossil fuel norms (Hestres and Hopke, 2020; Ferns and Amaeshi, 2021; Goods, 2022; Wright *et al.*, 2022). Norm antipreneurs oppose norm change through various means, such as lobbying, political pressure such as campaign-donations to political parties (Bloomfield, 2016, p. 330), legal challenges (Hilson, 2016), public campaigns, or (subtle) obstructive tactics within decision-making processes (Bloomfield and Scott, 2016, p. 13), to name a few. Their actions can have the effect of slowing or even stopping the normative change process. For instance, Nisbett and Spaiser, (2023) studied how during COP24, COP25, and COP26, it became evident that while youth climate activists were prominently featured and their normative appeal highlighted, there was also a resurgence and reinforcement of the denial discourse—from norm antipreneurs—where youth climate activists confronted a backlash from individuals and groups opposing the norms advocated by them for climate action.²¹ Further, Kinley *et al.*, (2021) highlights as to how in the context of thirty-three years of international climate negotiations, the lack of effective implementation of treaty commitments by governments is the primary reason for the inadequate progress, further exacerbated by the insufficient response from the business sector. For instance, the fossil fuel industry, which is financially and politically powerful, has been successful in preventing effective measures to stabilize the Earth's climate and is pushing back against emerging norms and the actors promoting them (see Green, 2018; Mayer, 2022; Wright *et al.*, 2022).

By acknowledging the role of norm antipreneurs, it becomes possible to conceive a range of roles that actors could assume when attempting to alter global norms. Norm entrepreneurs, who are seen as "pure changers," and antipreneurs, who are characterised as "implacable resisters," should be viewed as the ideal extremes on this spectrum, with other roles positioned between these two endpoints (Bloomfield, 2016, p. 311). For instance, "competitor entrepreneurs" are closer to the entrepreneur, while "creative resisters" are closer to the antipreneurs—and sensitivity to the context is crucial in determining roles (Bloomfield, 2016). "Competitor entrepreneurs" refer to actors within the same normative community who recognize the need for change but have differing opinions regarding the specific extent and content of the new norm (*ibid*). On the other hand, according to Campbell-Verduyn, creative resisters (2017) or similar actors outlined in Acharya's norm subsidiarity model (2011) are actors who do not belong to the same normative community as the norm entrepreneurs but are willing to accept

²¹ See *Chapter 6: Norm Champions and Norm Antipreneurs* to read more on norm antipreneurs and the way they resist/block diffusing norms in climate negotiations.

some degree of change due to factors like persuasion or circumstances. These actors defend the existing status quo while making minimal adjustments (Bloomfield, 2016).

Therefore, according to Bloomfield, (2016), recognition of resistance in norm diffusion is key. In issue-areas where the normative status quo is quite established, it is possible to differentiate clearly between norm entrepreneurs and norm antipreneurs. In such contexts, antipreneurs have notable tactical and strategic advantages, which are often overlooked. In understanding the two strategic tactics norm entrepreneurs employ to succeed—it is easier to map the two counter strategies norm antipreneurs may use to defend the status quo. Firstly, norm entrepreneurs must demonstrate that there exists a normative problem that requires a critique of the current moral standards, and secondly, they must present a workable solution in the form of a new norm. For the counterstrategy, the norm antipreneurs may defend the existing status quo norm by refuting entrepreneurs' claims that it produces morally problematic outcomes—dismissing such claims as "alarmist" (Bloomfield, 2016, p. 323). Legro identifies such behaviour as having socio-psychological advantages – as people have a bias against change unless it is heavily damaging not to do embrace change. He terms it as 'if it ain't broke, don't fix it' disposition (2000, p. 425). And even if norm entrepreneurs may successfully establish the existence of a normative problem that demands resolution, as has been the case in the context of climate change (see Mitchell and Carpenter, 2019; Heidrich and Nakonieczna-Bartosiewicz, 2021; Nisbett and Spaiser, 2022), antipreneurs can then employ their second tactic, which involves weakening the proposed new norm—or undermining it altogether (Bloomfield, 2016).

Conclusion

Throughout the chapter, the theoretical framework of the research was developed, grounding it in the Theory on *Cycles of Norm Change* (Sandholtz, 2017), with a special emphasis on the third stage (argumentation), and the fourth stage (norm change).

It was found that exploring global norms in their relation to other norms (as in norm clusters, or norm constellations) and in relations to agency (as in norm entrepreneurs, norm champions and norm antipreneurs) is imperative in grappling with the norm dynamics in the third and fourth stage, as well in the transition from third to fourth stage. This posits the relevance of moral arguments (by norm entrepreneurs and norm champions) (Price, 1998), the presence of 'moral' counter-frames (by norm antipreneurs) (see Seidman, 2015, p. 1033; Jamieson, 2017; Green, 2018), and the importance of transformative agency (Virkkunen, 2006, p. 49;

Haapasaari, Engeström and Kerosuo, 2016, p. 233) amidst global norms that cluster together for resiliency, rather than just robustness of individual norms (Lantis and Wunderlich, 2018).

The theoretical framework fits into the broader scholarship of norm research and constructivism. As such, this literature review contributes to the growing scholarship of research on norm dynamics—however, the emphasis on how global norms interact with each other and its relationship with agency under the normative discourses with respect to climate change has not been investigated. This limitation can be overcome through qualitative analysis of how agency interprets the global norms that transcend from public discourses like the social movements, and youth climate protests. Further, critically analysing the decisions of negotiations. My contribution through this research, therefore, will be to explore the emerging new framework through these perspectives. In the following chapters, a detailed analysis through empirical research will follow, utilising this theoretical premise and developing further—exploring how global norms advocated by climate movements influence the international climate negotiations at the UNFCCC COPs.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodological framework underpinning the thesis. It begins by detailing the research design and epistemological positioning, justifying the adoption of a qualitative approach [*Section 3.1*]. It then explains the data collection methods, including expert interviews [*subsection 3.1.1*] and the analysis of UNFCCC COP cover decisions [*subsection 3.1.2*], further, describes the coding strategies used to identify and interpret eight specific global norms and principled idea(s). The chapter also discusses the integration of these datasets through triangulation to enhance analytical depth and validity, while critically reflecting on methodological limitations [*Section 3.2*].

3.1 Research Design

The thesis follows qualitative analysis. Guba and Lincoln argue that quantitative analysis often overlooks meaning and purpose due to the *etic/emic* dilemma; this occurs when outsider (*etic*) theories or hypotheses may lack relevance or meaning from the insider (*emic*) perspective of the individuals, groups, or cultures being studied (1994). Qualitative research, on the other hand, reveals *emic* views and emphasises case-by-case analysis, addressing the flaws of generalisation and clarifying ambiguities (1994); further enabling researchers to "see the world through the subject's eyes," thereby identifying dominant powers and institutions that shape those perspectives (Pierce, 2008, p. 46).

Ontologically, the climate crisis is evidenced by a warming planet (see IPCC, 2022, 2023), environmental decline (Carolan, 2004; The Economist, 2021; Ann Samuel *et al.*, 2024) increasing poverty (see Alston, 2019; Ann Samuel, 2024), and insufficient political will (see Kinley *et al.*, 2021). Epistemologically, the nature, scope, and limits of such knowledge of what is 'real' and thus happening—helps explore such knowledge is constructed, disseminated, and utilised across diverse contexts. For instance, an epistemological view examines not just the reality of climate change or the lack of political will in itself, but also the "conditions of acquiring the knowledge of that which exists" (Hay, 2002, p. 60). Here, for instance, questions such as what more is needed to elevate political will and coordinated international responses, becomes of importance (Beardsworth, 2023). This includes, among other factors, interrogating whether international climate negotiations incorporate and apply knowledge systems from various cultures, whether climate movements indeed influence these negotiations, and/or addressing other critical questions that contribute to the evolving landscape of knowledge.

While the qualitative approach enables a detailed examination of discursive practices and actors' perspectives, the thesis recognises that global norms are socially constructed and seeks to understand how meaning is negotiated within international climate negotiations. Consequently, focusing also on understanding the meanings that actors assign to norms, and ideas (see Bryman, 2016).

To guide the data analysis, I first identified potential normative frames through an extensive review of relevant literature:

Anti-Fossil Fuel norms: Drawing on Green, “anti-fossil fuel norms” can be defined as emerging global moral norms that prescribe the reduction and eventual elimination of fossil fuel extraction, production, and use. anti-fossil fuel norms are manifested through policies and practices such as fossil fuel divestment, phase-out commitments, moratoria on new fossil fuel projects, and bans on activities like fracking, and signal a shift in international expectations toward decarbonisation and climate responsibility (2018). Anti-fossil fuel norms are prescriptive/inhibitive norms that identify actions, attitudes, or practices around fossil fuels as socially/morally unacceptable, undesirable, or harmful.

Climate Justice norms: Although the interpretation of climate justice varies across contexts and communities (see Atapattu, 2019)—it typically encompasses three key principles as highlighted in the Sixth Assessment Report by the Intergovernmental Panel for Climate Change (IPCC): (1) procedural justice—focusing on inclusivity in decision-making; (2) recognition— involving genuine respect and active engagement with a variety of cultures and viewpoints, ensuring they are fairly considered, and (3) distributive justice—concerning the fair distribution of responsibilities and advantages among individuals, nations, and generations (IPCC, 2022a; Ann Samuel, 2024).

Intergenerational Equity norms: Intergenerational equity norms are ethical principles concerned with fairness and justice between different generations, particularly regarding how current actions affect future people's rights, resources, and opportunities. Intergenerational equity lacks clear conceptual boundaries, frequently intersecting with related principles like sustainable development, precaution, and the common heritage of humankind (see Dupuy and Viñuales, 2018; Sands et al., 2018; Bertram, 2023). Yet, for the thesis, these norms are identified through the normative discourses that are primarily built on the Brundtland Commission's definition of sustainable development as: meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (1987). Over

time, it has evolved in both form and meaning. In recent years scholars observe that it is often framed in rights-based terms, portraying future generations as rights holders (Bertram, 2023). The fluidity in the semantic articulation of intergenerational equity facilitates its convergence and alignment with other normative frameworks. Bookman and Wewerinke-Singh observes that the principle underscores the importance of “fairness and flexibility” (2025, p. 344). Within the climate change context, it requires decision-makers to consider issues of justice—specifically, how the impacts of climate-related harms, policy choices, and inaction are distributed across generations (Bookman and Wewerinke-Singh, 2025).

Human Rights norms: Human rights norms, broadly speaking, are shared standards of expected behaviour that define what governments, and other actors should or should not do in relation to human dignity and fundamental freedoms. In the thesis, they are not understood solely through a legalistic framework, but also as socially constructed discourse that takes shape through actual lived practices and implementation for human rights, elevating its nexus with justice measures amidst climate change (Wallbott and Schapper, 2017). As a meta-norm, human rights include right-based discourses for vulnerable populations and the right to a safe, clean, sustainable and just environment. Further, human rights have evolved into a dominant political framework, or what Mervyn Frost identifies as "settled norms" (Frost, 1996, pp. 104–11) within today's international community—i.e., as principles that are broadly recognised as authoritative across the global state system. This is particularly relevant to climate change, since as “settled” norms, human rights can increasingly shape public discourse and international expectations for just and equitable climate action, hence amplifying contestation around these norms. This also highlights how human rights norms, shaped by movements and public opinion, influence expectations regarding how the demand for climate action should be matched by the supply of appropriate measures, law, and governance frameworks (Ann Samuel, 2024c).

Loss and Damage norms: Loss and damage refers to the adverse impacts of climate change, both from slow onset events and extreme weather events, that result in harm to human and natural systems; where these impacts are categorised into economic losses, involving the loss of resources, goods, and services commonly traded in markets, and non-economic losses, which encompass those items not typically exchanged in markets, such as cultural heritage, ecosystems, and human health (UNFCCC, 2018). UNFCCC's current working definition is that loss and damage is “the actual and/or potential manifestation of impacts associated with climate change in developing countries that negatively affect human and natural systems”

(UNFCCC, 2012, p. 3). Two years later, the UNFCCC recognised that loss and damage encompasses impacts beyond those addressed by adaptation alone in (UNFCCC, 2014).²² Put simply, loss and damage generally refers to the adverse effects of climate change that persist despite mitigation and adaptation measures (Roberts and Huq, 2015; McNamara and Jackson, 2019).

Global Earth Stewardship norms: These norms aligns largely with the Earth Stewardship norms where it is defined as the “proactive shaping of physical, biological, and social conditions to sustain, rather than disrupt, critical earth-system processes in support of nature and human wellbeing at local-to-planetary scales.” (Chapin *et al.*, 2010, 2022; Steffen *et al.*, 2011; Chapin III, 2024, p. 1). It is also at times referred to as planetary stewardship (Steffen *et al.*, 2011), ecosystem stewardship (Chapin *et al.*, 2010), environmental stewardship (Falkner and Buzan, 2019). References to impacts of climate change on biodiversity, ocean ecosystems, nature (i.e., references to nature-based solutions, rights of nature, mother earth), and the ecosystem (encompassing mountains, rivers, flora and fauna), highlight the interconnectedness between climate and ecosystems and hence are included under this category.

Ecocide norms: Ecocide is defined as the “unlawful or wanton acts committed with knowledge that there is a substantial likelihood of severe and either widespread or long-term damage to the environment being caused by those acts.” (Stop Ecocide International, 2021). This category also refers to normative arguments characterising damages inflicted upon nature as criminal offenses, thus invoking criminal rather than civil liabilities.

Sufficiency (principled idea): Sufficiency policies are a set of measures and daily practices that avoid demand for energy, materials, land, and water while delivering human wellbeing for all within planetary boundaries (IPCC, 2022b). Sufficiency posits a normative framework to explore what it means to have enough (Darby, 2007) constituting a collection of measures and day-to-day lived-practices that reduces energy demand, materials, land, and water despite emphasising welfare measures for all within planetary boundaries (Shukla *et al.*, 2022, p. 31). Sufficiency norms, therefore, primarily critique economic models that prioritise perpetual growth and wealth accumulation, advocating instead for reduced consumption and demand management to ensure well-being for all within planetary boundaries.

²² See Decision 2/CP.19

Identifying the eight normative frames led to the formulation of eight distinct ‘codes’²³ corresponding to specific global norms I codes used to categorise the data (i.e., for interviews and cover decisions) into thematic clusters were derived from the eight norms identified above and their definitions as established in the literature. That said, in addition to these eight normative codes, *Appendix I* outlines the additional codes I identified to analyse various normative dynamics in relation to these global norms, the UNFCCC COP negotiations, and specific behaviours of state and non-state actors.

Using these normative frames, two qualitative research approaches were undertaken: (1) the Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) of expert interviews; (2) the Discourse Analysis (DA) of Cover Decision(s) of the UNFCCC COPs 24 – 28.

3.1.1 Expert Interviews

Twenty interviews were conducted from February to June 2024 with members from the COP presidency teams, civil servants, negotiators, United Nations officials, and accredited observers (those holding UNFCCC COP badges granting access to the Blue Zone). Participants in these interviews had attended one or more UNFCCC COP negotiations between COP24 and COP28: COP24 (Katowice, Poland, 2018), COP25 (Madrid, Spain, 2019), COP26 (Glasgow, United Kingdom, 2021), COP27 (Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt, 2022), and COP28 (Dubai, UAE, 2023).

For the interviews, 41 potential participants were approached. Of these, 27 responded, while 14 did not reply. Among the respondents, 7 declined to participate, leaving a final sample of 20 interviewees. All interviews were conducted online; 10 interviews were attended by my supervisor, Prof. Viktoria Spaiser, and 3 by Prof. Richard Beardsworth. Their presence during the early stages of data collection was invaluable, helping me learn how to probe in greater depth and navigate semi-structured interviews more effectively.

Potential interview partners were identified through the UNFCCC website (<https://unfccc.int/>), official COP websites, and snowballing. In addition, attending COP28 in the UAE (30 November – 13 December 2023) as part of the Priestley Centre for Climate Futures - University of Leeds delegation provided further opportunities to identify potential participants. I also employed the snowballing technique for data collection—a non-random, purposive sampling

²³ For further details on the coding process, see *Section 3.1.2.1 - Data Analysis*

method in which participants are deliberately selected based on their relevance or expertise regarding a specific event (see Burnham *et al.*, 2008; Pierce, 2008; Laws *et al.*, 2013).

Most contact details were obtained from publicly available sources and official websites, and in several cases, I reached out directly via LinkedIn/Twitter(X) to request email addresses. Many interviewees were connected through mutual professional networks, including the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) – World Commission on Environmental Law (WCEL), the Sabin Centre for Climate Change Law – Columbia Law School (Global Climate Litigation Database Peer-Review Network), the Centre for International Sustainable Development Law (CISDL), Climate Law and Governance Initiative (CLGI) and the Global Network for Human Rights and the Environment (GNHRE), among others. Being part of these professional networks throughout my PhD was helpful. Additionally, reaching out directly to relevant government ministries and the UNFCCC Secretariat also proved effective in securing participants.

3.1.1.1 Ethical Considerations:

Ethical approval for the semi-structured expert interviews was granted by the *Business, Earth & Environment, Social Sciences (AREA FREC) Committee* on 10th May 2023: Ref no. 0559 (see Appendix – III). All interviewees received an information sheet on how their interview data will be used and safeguarded and signed an informed consent form. Anonymity was guaranteed to all interviewees to ensure they could speak freely on confidential matters.

3.1.1.2 Interview guide:

An interview guide was developed ahead of the data collection phase and used during the interviews to steer conversations, ensuring consistency, and facilitating the answering of the three sub-research questions of the thesis.²⁴ The interview guide was structured around seven overarching questions that framed discussions on the influence of climate movements in international climate negotiations, with particular emphasis on advocacy.²⁵

The questions probed the influence of movements such as youth climate activists and Indigenous Peoples, as well as campaigns like *Stop Ecocide International* and the *Climate Youth Negotiators Program* (Youth Negotiators Academy). These examples were used to

²⁴ See *Chapter 1 Introduction*

²⁵ See *Appendix II*

examine how multiple campaigns, climate movements and transnational advocacy networks shape negotiation dynamics.

When exploring normative arguments advanced by climate movements, the interviews considered themes including anti-fossil-fuel norms, climate justice, intergenerational equity and justice, loss and damage, human rights, the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment, global environmental stewardship, ecocide, and sufficiency. Particular attention was paid to the moral obligation to safeguard the environment for future generations (e.g., through the concept of a duty of care) and how this is referenced in negotiations.

Arguments against fossil-fuels were taken due notice—including, assessing the impact of campaigns advocating for the phasing out of fossil fuels, their resonance in international talks, and the extent to which they influence negotiation outcomes. Overlaps among normative arguments were explored, asking whether different moral claims converge on shared underlying principles, and how such arguments evolve over time to evoke normative shifts/gains in negotiations.

3.1.1.3 Interview Partners:

Twenty interviews were conducted for the thesis. The interviewees represented a diverse group of stakeholders in international climate negotiations. Specifically, the group included nine negotiators, five UNFCCC/UN officials, and six observers. Among these interviewees, there were seven women and thirteen men, reflecting gender diversity.

The participants were from a wide range of countries, including Bangladesh, Belize, Canada, Egypt, France, Germany, Iran, Morocco, Norway, Palau, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, the United States, Tuvalu, Australia, Tunisia, and India; some interviewees were observed to have attended COPs in different roles and/or on behalf of different countries or as part of different movements.²⁶ It is important to note that some interviewees, although institutionally affiliated with a particular country for the purposes of COP participation, did not necessarily represent only that country. In some cases, individuals also identified with or expressed affinities toward their country of origin or other states with which they had personal or professional ties.

²⁶ See Chapters 5, 6, and 7 to comprehend this complex political landscape amongst the COP negotiators, observers and UN officials, across their varied, nuanced, multiple or single focus/roles.

This complexity is partly attributable to the UNFCCC badge allocation system, which does not always align Party badges with citizenship, but rather with a participant's official role, institutional affiliation, or delegation function.

Out of the 20 participants, 14 reported attending COP24, 13 had a presence at COP25, and 18 attended COP26 to COP28. Each interview partner was given an anonymous code (IP01 to IP20). Some interviewees were also observed to have participated in different roles and/or representing different countries across these COPs.

The representation of each IP in respective COPs is given below:

Interview Partner	COPs attended	Role at COP	Occupation	Affiliated Country / Party represented	Country from / native	Gender
IP01	COP26, 27, 28	Observer	Politician, Academic	United Kingdom	Chile	Female
IP02	COP24-28	Negotiator	Lawyer	Morocco	Morocco	Male
IP03	COP24-28	Observer, Negotiator	Lawyer, UN official	Global	United States	Male
IP04	COP24-28	Observer, Negotiator	Lawyer, Academic	Global	Norway	Female
IP05	COP24-28	Observer	Lawyer, UN official	Global	Canada	Male
IP06	COP24-28	Negotiator	Lawyer	Bangladesh	Bangladesh	Male
IP07	COP24, 26, 28	Observer	Lawyer, Academic	United Kingdom	United Kingdom	Male
IP08	COP27, 28	Negotiator	Consultant	Palau	Palau	Female
IP09	COP24-28	UN official	UN official	Global	United States	Male
IP10	COP24-26	UN official	UN official	Global	United States	Female
IP11	COP24-28	Negotiator	Diplomat	Belize	Belize	Female
IP12	COP26-28	Observer	Campaigner	United Kingdom	United Kingdom	Female
IP13	COP24-28	Negotiator	Activist, Entrepreneur	Switzerland, Global	Switzerland	Female
IP14	COP24-28	Negotiator	Diplomat	Egypt	Egypt	Male
IP15	COP24-28	Negotiator	Consultant	Tunisia	Tunisia	Male
IP16	COP24-28	Negotiator	Diplomat	Global	France	Male
IP17	COP26-28	Observer	Lawyer	Multiple Parties	Iran	Male
IP18	COP26-28	Negotiator	Government Official	United States	United States	Male
IP19	COP26-28	Negotiator	Government Official	Tuvalu	Tuvalu	Male
IP20	COP27, 28	Negotiator	Campaigner, Entrepreneur	Global, Multiple Parties	India	Female

Table 3.1: Representation of Interview Partners in respective COPs

The unique breadth and range of expertise among the selected interview ensured a comprehensive, multi-dimensional perspective to the analysis. For instance, seasoned negotiators and high-ranking government officials offered firsthand accounts of policy and negotiation processes, revealing strategies, decision-making mechanisms, and the complexities of reaching international agreements. Their experiences illuminate the practical challenges and subtle nuances of diplomacy in climate negotiations. Legal experts contributed in-depth insights into international environmental law, the technical aspects of climate negotiations, the politics embedded in international law and its impact on climate action, compliance mechanisms, and the pivotal role of legal instruments in enforcing climate commitments. Additionally, insights from human rights officers and independent experts highlighted how human rights considerations are increasingly intertwined with climate policies, emphasising issues such as climate justice, the rights of vulnerable populations, and intergenerational justice. This framing underscore climate change as not only an environmental challenge but also a critical human rights concern.

Perspectives from NGO representatives and activists illustrated how civil society influences negotiations, advocates for stronger action, and holds parties accountable, highlighting the critical role of civil society in shaping international climate discourse. Interviews with founders and champions of youth initiatives revealed the growing involvement of young people in negotiations, the challenges they face, and the importance of capacity-building programs to empower future climate leaders. Moreover, each interview partner's answers revealed overlaps in themes and strategies.

The geographical diversity of participants allowed for comparative analysis of regional challenges and priorities, exploring concerns such as loss and damage for Small Island Developing States, adaptation needs for developing countries, and mitigation responsibilities for developed nations—but also, interesting overlaps, for instance, how mitigation may work in developing countries, and how equity is also a concern for developed countries.

Participants with long-term involvement—more than five interview partners had over 20 years of negotiation experience—provided valuable perspectives on how negotiations have evolved, documenting shifts in priorities and the progression of normative change within the UNFCCC framework. Finally, the variety of roles among participants underscored the intersectionality of climate change with broader global issues, including biodiversity, sustainable development, human rights, and economic growth.

3.1.1.4 Data Analysis:

The analysis of the interview data was conducted using conceptual Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA). Given the diversity of roles, expertise, and perspectives among the interviewees, QCA was particularly suited to this study, as it allowed for a nuanced analysis of how different stakeholder groups articulate, experience, and influence global climate negotiations, while ensuring that both commonalities and contrasts were rigorously examined. QCA is “a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns” (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005, p. 1278). Mayring, (2000) emphasises that it is an “empirical and methodologically controlled approach” to analysing texts within their communicative contexts—following content-analytic rules (p. 2)—and thereby helps to “identify core consistencies and meanings” (Patton, 2002, p. 453) Therefore, QCA emphasises an integrated view of speech/texts and their specific contexts. Moreover, this approach recognises that subjectivity is an inherent part of understanding social contexts but mitigates bias through careful methodology by systematically exploring the meanings underlying messages (Zhang and Wildemuth, 2008). The analysis was implemented through systematic coding procedures, the development of clear coding frames, and regular cross-checking of codes to ensure consistency and transparency throughout the process. The interview transcripts captured the individual experiences of negotiators and other interviewees in relation to international climate negotiations. Literal verbalisations, as well as auditory observations of non-verbal behaviours during interviews (e.g., sounds, pauses), were included in the transcripts and carefully analysed.

Utilising MAXQDA's robust features, I imported the anonymised transcripts and organised them systematically. I then employed MAXQDA²⁷ to analyse the interview transcripts, aiming to capture the nuanced experiences and perspectives of negotiators involved in international climate negotiations. Each sentence of the transcript was carefully read and assessed to determine whether sections needed coding. A code in qualitative analysis is most often “a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (Saldaña, 2009, p. 3).

²⁷ During coding, I explored limits and advantages of both Nvivo and MAXQDA, and albeit both were considerably user-friendly and beneficial, I preferred MAXQDA for personal preference of colour coding.

Importantly, I began analysing and coding while data collection was still ongoing. This iterative approach proved valuable because it allowed for the early identification of emerging themes and concepts, which could inform subsequent interviews and be incorporated into the evolving coding manual. As data collection continued, new themes and concepts were integrated into the coding framework, meaning the coding process involved ongoing assessment and adaptation to accommodate evolving insights. My approach combined both deductive and inductive coding methodologies. Initially, I developed a preliminary coding scheme based on existing literature and theoretical frameworks pertinent to climate negotiations and normative change. This framework included codes such as "Anti-fossil Fuel Norms," "Climate Justice," "Loss and Damage," and "Intergenerational Equity." As I delved deeper into the data, I remained open to emerging and recurring themes, allowing new codes to be inductively developed from the participants' narratives. I applied codes to relevant text segments, employing color-coding and hierarchical structures to manage main codes and sub-codes effectively. For instance, under the code "Global Earth Stewardship/Global Environmental Responsibility," I introduced the sub-code "Biodiversity" as this theme emerged prominently during analysis. I also highlighted certain sentences which I believed could be used as quotes from interviewees, to substantiate my analysis. MAXQDA's feature to write memo notes throughout the transcript and codes, was instrumental in capturing my reflections, initial interpretations, and analytical insights as I coded, fostering a reflexive and iterative process. Ensuring coding consistency was paramount. Although I was the sole coder, I periodically revisited coded segments to maintain alignment with code definitions. In cases where text segments were ambiguous or relevant to multiple codes, I applied multiple codes or consulted the coding framework (i.e., the excel sheet where I had definitions of codes/normative frames, or how I aim to identify the codes)²⁸ to clarify distinctions. This iterative refinement enhanced both the reliability and validity of the coding process.

As new themes and concepts surfaced, I adapted the coding framework accordingly. The emergence of topics like "climate litigation," "women/gender" and "right to a clean healthy and sustainable environment" led to the inclusion of additional codes. I revisited the transcripts to apply these new codes where appropriate, ensuring a comprehensive and consistent analysis across the dataset. This adaptability was crucial in capturing the evolving insights and maintaining the analysis's relevance to the research objectives.

²⁸ See Appendix – I: *Codes for MAXQDA*

The granularity of the codes was deliberately designed to capture nuanced insights and facilitate a detailed analysis. As far as possible, sentence-wise coding helped in bringing out the nuances, subtle meanings, narratives, and emotions in the words. Differentiating between codes such as "influence from youth climate activists," "influence from other climate movements," and "influence from NGOs" allowed for a more precise understanding of the various influences on negotiators. Similarly, distinguishing between "enabling factors for normative change" and "dampening factors/barriers for normative change" (excluding actors) helped identify systemic elements affecting normative change in the context of negotiations. Once qualitative coding of all interview data was completed, properties and dimensions of all codes were explored, identifying interrelationships between them, discovering patterns, and assessing the categories in light of the complete dataset (Bradley, 1993). On this basis a comprehensive interpretation of the data was conducted.

Ethical considerations were meticulously taken into considerations. All data were handled with strict confidentiality, and any identifying information was anonymised to protect participants' anonymity. I engaged in reflexivity, continuously reflecting on my role as a researcher and acknowledging potential biases. However, challenges arose when coding complex or overlapping themes. In such cases, I carefully deliberated on the most appropriate codes or applied multiple codes to a single segment to capture the full scope of the content. This careful attention ensured that the richness of the data was preserved and accurately represented.

3.1.2 UNFCCC COP Cover Decisions:

Data was sourced for the Discourse Analysis (DA) from the UNFCCC cover decisions (of COP24 to COP28). A UNFCCC COP cover decision is a formal outcome document adopted at the end of a COP meeting. These decisions embed the agreements reached by the parties (i.e. countries) on various climate-related issues during the conference. The cover decision typically outlines the commitments and actions that parties agree to undertake to address climate change, including but not limited to mitigation, adaptation, finance, and technology transfer. The cover decision serves as an overarching framework that guides the implementation of specific measures and policies. It reflects the collective political will of the parties and sets the agenda for future climate action. The content of a cover decision can vary significantly from one COP to another, depending on the negotiations and priorities at that time.

Cover decisions are particularly relevant for this research as they encapsulate the negotiated agreements and reflect the prevailing discourses and normative shifts within the climate

negotiations. Analysing these documents provides valuable insights into how global norms are articulated, contested, and institutionalised over successive COPs, thereby directly addressing the research question.

Cover Decisions in each UNFCCC COP came as:

UNFCCC COP	Cover Decision (Name)	Document(s)
COP24 (2018, Katowice, Poland)	Katowice Climate Package	Decision 1/CP.24; Decision 3-20/CMA.1 ²⁹
COP25 (2019, Madrid, Spain)	Chile-Madrid Time for Action	Decision 1/CP.25, Decision, Decision 1/CMA.2, and Decision 1/CMP.15
COP26 (2021, Glasgow, UK)	Glasgow Climate Pact	Decision 1/CP.26, 1/CMA.3 and 1/CMP.16
COP27 (2022, Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt)	Sharm el-Sheikh Implementation Plan	Decision 1/CP.27 and Decision 1/CMA.4
COP28 (2023, Dubai, UAE)	UAE Consensus	Decision 1/CP.28 and 5/CMA.5 ³⁰ Decision 16/CP.28 and 21/CMA.5 ³¹ Decision 1/CMA.5 ³² Decision 3/CMA.5 ³³ Decision 4/CMA.5 ³⁴

²⁹ The *Katowice Climate Package*, comprising of decisions adopted at COP 24 (Decision 1/CP.24; Decisions 3/CMA.1–20/CMA.1), is organised into nine clusters, each corresponding to specific provisions of the Paris Agreement as set out in Decision 1/CP.21 and operationalized through procedural mechanisms: (1) *Art. 4 & paras 22–35, 1/CP.21*: mitigation guidance, NDC registry [4/CMA.1], common time frames [5/CMA.1], response measures forum [6/CMA.1, 7/CMA.1]; (2) *Art. 6 & paras 36–40: [8/CMA.1]*; (3) *Art. 7 & paras 41, 42, 45: adaptation communications, registry, related matters [9–11/CMA.1]*; (4) *Art. 9 & paras 52–64: finance information, Adaptation Fund governance, new collective goal [12–14/CMA.1]*; (5) *Art. 10 & paras 66–70: technology framework, periodic assessment scope (15–16/CMA.1)*; (6) *Art. 12 & paras 82–83: education, training, awareness [17/CMA.1]*; (7) *Art. 13 & paras 84–98: transparency framework modalities [18/CMA.1]*; (8) *Art. 14 & paras 99–101: global stocktake [19/CMA.1]*; (9) *Art. 15 & paras 102–103: implementation and compliance committee modalities [20/CMA.1]*.

³⁰ Decision 1/CP.28 and 5/CMA.5 - Operationalization of the new funding arrangements (Loss and Damage)

³¹ Decision 16/CP.28 and 21/CMA.5 - Presidency youth climate champion

³² Decision 1/CMA.5 - Outcome of the first global Stocktake

³³ Decision 3/CMA.5 - United Arab Emirates just transition work programme

³⁴ Decision 4/CMA.5 - Sharm el-Sheikh mitigation ambition and implementation work programme

		Decision FCCC/PA/CMA/2023/L.18 ³⁵
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Table 3.2: Cover Decisions in each UNFCCC COP

The cover decisions are complex documents, often spanning COP, CMA and CMP.³⁶ Cover Decision of COP25, COP26 and COP27 were comparatively less complex in terms of how the decisions mirror each other in different conference bodies, and how it together ties into as a cover decision with differing political, operative paragraphs and nuances. COP25 cover decision is *Chile-Madrid Time for Action* (Decision 1/CP.25, Decision 1/CMA.2, and Decision 1/CMP.15), COP24 *Glasgow Climate Pact* (Decision 1/CP.26, 1/CMA.3 and 1/CMP.16.)³⁷ and *Sharm el-Sheikh Implementation Plan* (Decision 1/CP.27 and Decision 1/CMA.4).

COP24 and COP28 were notably more extensive. The COP24 *Katowice Climate Package*, for instance, includes multiple documents: 1/CP.24, 3-20/CMA.1, and specific decisions that led to the Paris Agreement (Decision 1/CP.21). In a similar vein, the COP28 records the cover decision as the *UAE Consensus*, which included 2 documents of COP, and 6 documents of CMA.

3.1.2.1 Data Analysis:

The analysis of the cover decisions was done by using Discourse Analysis (DA). Discourse analysis is a qualitative research methodology concerned with the systematic study of language in use and its function in constructing social realities. It focuses not merely on linguistic frames, but on how language both reflects and/or shapes power relations, identities, and social norms. It examines linguistic regularities to the normative quality of discussions (Hajer and Versteeg, 2005). Dryzek defines discourse as a shared linguistic framework through which individuals interpret information and construct coherent narratives—grounded in underlying assumptions, judgments, and claims that shape the terms of analysis and debate (2022). Simply put, a

³⁵ Decision FCCC/PA/CMA/2023/L.18 - Glasgow–Sharm el-Sheikh work programme on the global goal on adaptation referred to in decision 7/CMA.3 (draft). Here, it is noted that the *Global Goal on Adaptation* represents a multi-year institutional process that culminated at COP28. Beginning with the *Glasgow–Sharm el-Sheikh work programme* launched at COP26 (FCCC/PA/CMA/2023/L.18), parties developed an adaptation framework through 2023, focusing particularly on target-setting. This process resulted in Decision 2/CMA.5, which adopted the *UAE Framework for Global Climate Resilience* as part of the broader *UAE Consensus* at COP28.

³⁶ CP (or COP) stands for Conference of the Parties; CMA: Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement; CMP: Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol.

³⁷ Decision 1/CP.26, 1/CMA.3 are perceived as central to the *Glasgow Climate Pact*. While these two versions are overlapping, the latter is more detailed, reflecting the Paris Agreement's role as the primary operational treaty. A third, purely procedural, version was adopted for the Kyoto Protocol following the expiry of its second commitment period in 2020 (1/CMP.16).

discourse may be defined as a way of talking about and understanding the world, or an aspect of it—emphasising that language is not just a neutral reflection of reality, but actively shaping perceptions, identities, and social relations (Jørgensen and J. Phillips, 2002), within International Relations and increasingly in analysing environmental politics and policy studies (see Feindt and Oels, 2005; Hajer and Versteeg, 2005; Isoaho and Karhunmaa, 2019).

Because discourse analysis views language as productive (not merely descriptive), it pays attention to how ideas, concepts, and categorisations are produced and reproduced through text and talk. Hajer (1995), for example, defines discourse as “an ensemble of ideas, concepts and categorisations that are produced, reproduced and transformed in a particular set of practices and through which meaning is given to physical and social realities” (1995, p. 44). This method often involves delving into narratives, metaphors, keywords, and framing in texts to understand how they reflect certain worldviews or power structures. As such, it helps reveal how language is used to legitimise certain perspectives or norms and marginalise others. This is key in analysing the UNFCCC COP cover decisions. Crucially, cover decisions are rich with normative language—they “welcome” certain actions, “urge” or “call upon” parties to do X, “recognize” principles, and so on.³⁸ Tracing embedded references to global norms helps explore normative shifts and the influence of climate movements on them.

To conduct the discourse analysis, MAXQDA was used. MAXQDA facilitated organised coding of the texts, retrieval of excerpts by code, and overall management of the qualitative data. The overall approach combined elements of inductive coding with deductive, literature-informed categorisation—in line with best practices for interpretive analysis of documents. Appendix I presents a detailed table illustrating how these norms—and their associated normative codes—are defined based on existing literature and conceptually framed for this research. I note here that, chronologically, I conducted the discourse analysis of UNFCCC COP cover decisions prior to the interviews. This sequence was chosen because the interviews constituted the primary data for the thesis, while the cover decisions served as secondary data, used to triangulate findings with the interview data and existing literature for Chapter 7. Thus, in Chapter 7, I examine whether advocacy by climate movements aimed at advancing global norms within the UNFCCC COP processes resulted in the incorporation of those referenced norms into the final texts.

³⁸ See Chapter 7: *COP Negotiation Processes, The Cover Decisions, and Normative Gains*

With a clear codebook of eight overarching normative frames (and their constituent sub-codes), I conducted a systematic coding of the cover decision texts in MAXQDA. Each cover decision document (each COP outcome text) was imported into MAXQDA. I coded the segments of text corresponding to the normative frames identified.³⁹ Often this meant highlighting a sentence or paragraph in the cover decision and tagging it with one or more codes or subcodes. For example, there were sentences that correspond to Human Rights norm category (and tagged with sub-codes like “indigenous rights” or “gender equality,” if mentioned) but resonate with Anti-Fossil-Fuel Norms. MAXQDA allowed me to attach multiple codes to a single passage if it touched on multiple norm areas. The software also enabled memos and annotations—for instance, I could note in a memo when certain phrasing echoed language from earlier agreements or specific countries’ rhetoric. Throughout this coding process, I remained attentive to context (a key practice in discourse analysis): not just what norm was referenced, but how it was discussed (e.g. is it a strong commitment, a vague encouragement, a contested point?). The coding was an iterative process, I occasionally refined code definitions or coding decisions upon encountering new instances that were borderline or complex, always referring back to the literature-grounded definitions to maintain consistency. I came back to the coded data even after my interviews, to see and analyse the different overlapping patterns—facilitating triangulation.

3.1.3 Triangulation of the two datasets

For Chapter 7, the thesis combines both Qualitative Content Analysis and Discourse Analysis—applied to different datasets i.e., the Expert Interviews and the UNFCCC COP Cover Decisions. Triangulation is a research strategy that uses multiple methods or data sources to study a phenomenon, enhancing the reliability and validity of the results. Though rooted in disciplines like geometry and navigation—where it was used to determine locations by measuring angles from fixed points, triangulation has been adopted in social research to enhance credibility by drawing on multiple, distinct data sources (Flick, 2014; Vogl, Schmidt and Zartler, 2019; Vivek, 2024). This approach presumes that individual sources are partial, but when combined, they can counterbalance each other's limitations (Moran-Ellis *et al.*, 2006). It reflects a belief—that convergence among data types strengthens the reliability of findings (Hammersley, 2008; Vogl, Schmidt and Zartler, 2019). The triangulation used here was

³⁹ See *Chapter 3 Section 3:1 Research Design* to read about the eight different normative codes listed.

embedded in an iterative process, where I had to revisit the list of norms to add and/or omit norms while qualitatively analysing the two datasets.

Triangulations enhance qualitative research for three reasons. Firstly, it enhances methodological complementarity—by using different approaches for different data sources, leveraging the strengths of each method. While discourse analysis enables critical examination of the discursive construction of climate change policies within UNFCCC texts, QCA explores the perspectives, experiences, and insights of negotiators through interviews. Combined, the two methods provide a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the research topic.

Secondly, triangulation reduces bias—strengthening the credibility and validity of the research findings. Moreover, given that expert interviews often reflect perspectives intertwined with “power and privilege” (Natow, 2020, p. 160)—where responses may be selective or strategically framed—I adopted triangulation to enhance the credibility and depth of the findings. The list of normative codes helped in the identification of recurrent normative discourses and thematic patterns—across the two data sets, which were subsequently corroborated through extensive engagement with the scholarly literature on social movements and international climate negotiations. Rigorous triangulation between the two qualitative datasets was conducted, for Chapter 7, complemented by an iterative process of literature verification.

Thirdly and finally, triangulation enhances theoretical insights, contributing to theory development and refinement. This is important as I build the thesis on the theoretical framework of Theory on *Cycles of Norm Change* (Sandholtz, 2017), adding to its scope as well as identifying its limitations, contributing further to norms research. Overall, the essence of triangulation helps in answering the research question in a coherent and consistent manner taking insights from the qualitative analysis of both the data sets.

3.2 Limitations

While the methodological approaches employed in this research—Discourse Analysis (DA) of UNFCCC COP cover decisions and Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) of expert interviews—provide comprehensive insights into normative changes in climate negotiations, three main limitations must be acknowledged: (1) for interviews, (2) cover decisions, and (3) personal limitations

First, as for interviews, particularly those who may be resistant to certain normative arguments and oppose its diffusion have provided vague responses and refrained from offering specific examples. I noted this especially in the cases of interviewees from the United States, and petrostates. This ambiguity limited the depth of insights that could be drawn from their perspectives. In addition, although efforts were made to achieve a diverse representation of interviewees, including negotiators, UNFCCC officials, and observers from various geographic regions, the sample size of 20 interviews remains relatively small to offer more in-depth analysis (even if the transcribed interviews amounted to 250+ pages of rich data). Consequently, the findings cannot be fully generalised to all stakeholders involved in international climate negotiations. Although there were no overrepresentation of certain regions or roles thereby biasing the results, I was not able to maintain an equal gender representation. There were fewer female interviewees, further, no other gender was interviewed, thus limiting the analysis from a fairer demographic representation. Though purposive sampling and snowballing techniques introduce are inherent in a qualitative content analysis (Sargeant, 2012)—the possibility of selection bias, where participants connected through my professional networks may share similar viewpoints or experiences remain. To mitigate the same, snowballing was complemented by random selection of negotiators and observers. I must also note that interviewing partners from Global South, or who are currently based in Global South was at times disrupted due to unstable internet connectivity. For instance, during one interview,⁴⁰ there was a power cut, and the interview partner had to wait for the electricity to come back to resume the interview.

Second, as for the cover decisions, the main limitation was the ambiguity to the definition and role of cover decisions in climate negotiations remain, and the term itself lacks a clear, consistent meaning.⁴¹ Since COP cover decisions differ in both structure and content from one conference to another, the analysis has proven difficult—complicating comparisons across COPs. Cover decisions encapsulate negotiated agreements that are often the result of complex, multi-faceted negotiations involving numerous stakeholders with divergent interests. Disentangling the specific influence of global norms from other factors influencing these decisions was difficult. While cover decisions are pivotal in reflecting negotiated outcomes, they do not capture the entirety of the negotiation process. Informal negotiations, side events, and behind-the-scenes diplomacy play significant roles in shaping outcomes but are not directly

⁴⁰ Interview of IP06

⁴¹ See Chapter 7: *COP Negotiation Processes, The Cover Decisions, and Normative Gains*

accessible through cover decision documents. This limitation have constituted an incomplete understanding of how norms are negotiated and integrated into formal agreements.

Finally, I note personal limitations to the thesis work. As the sole researcher conducting both the Discourse Analysis and the Qualitative Content Analysis, there is an inherent risk of personal biases influencing the interpretation of data. Despite efforts to maintain objectivity through systematic coding and reflexivity, personal beliefs and perspectives may have subtly shaped how data is analysed and interpreted. Supervision meetings, and constant correspondence with the supervisors helped mitigate this to a large extent. I always sought a consensus amongst the three supervisors and myself before moving forward with a decision with respect to collection and/or analysis of data. Further, my experience with advanced analytical techniques and software tools like MAXQDA has developed over the course of three years of doctoral research. Yet the time and effort needed for learning the software might have limited the depth and breadth of the analysis, potentially overlooking nuanced patterns or themes that a more seasoned researcher might identify. This is also because, I started with Nvivo, but switched for personal preference for better interface experience; where MAXQDA offered coloured coding, Nvivo was just blue and yellow (with limitations to navigate codes with memos that record preferred emojis and more). This is a personal limitation and switching software for tedious reasons could have been avoided, thinking retrospectively.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the methodological framework underpinning the thesis. Through the combined use of Qualitative Content Analysis of expert interviews and Discourse Analysis of UNFCCC COP cover decisions, the research design offered a plausible empirical study to understand how global norms emerge, evolve, and interact within international climate negotiations. Triangulation of these two distinct datasets enhanced the depth and credibility of the analysis, despite acknowledging limits. Scholars observe how multilateral negotiations constitute a complex web of visible and concealed interactions; media briefings, press releases, and interest group statements offer only partial insights, while official records represent merely the surface of events (Lang, 2019). Hence, since internal delegation reports remain largely inaccessible, research typically relies on interviews, participant accounts, and triangulation with official documents to reconstruct negotiation dynamics (Lang, 2019). As such, this thesis has drawn on a diverse range of sources to analyse the interplay between global norms, institutional processes, and climate politics. Most references consist of scholarly literature,

including peer-reviewed journal articles, academic monographs, and edited volumes, which provide the conceptual and theoretical frameworks for examining norm contestation and diffusion. Alongside this, institutional documents, policy reports, and organisational outputs from bodies such as the UNFCCC (from COP presidency websites, and constituency websites),⁴² IPCC, and youth-led initiatives have been used to capture the evolving dynamics of negotiations and governance practices. Media reports, blogs, and public commentary further complement these materials by providing insights into activist narratives, grassroots mobilisation, and real-time developments where academic scholarship is still emerging. This combination of academic, institutional, and media sources allows the thesis to situate theoretical debates within the broader socio-political context, ensuring a robust and multi-layered analysis of climate negotiation processes.

By situating the research design within broader debates on normative change, this chapter establishes the analytical foundations for the empirical examination of how climate movements influence global climate governance—which are examined in the subsequent chapters.

⁴² See Chapter 5 to read about different UNFCCC Constituencies

Chapter 4: Global Norms and International Climate Negotiations

Chapter 4 examines the references to global norms in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conferences of Parties (COPs). It contributes to answering the first research question of this thesis: *Which global norms advanced by transnational climate advocacy groups (and climate movements) are referenced in international climate negotiations?* The chapter analyses how negotiators have referenced the eight norms from COP24 to COP28⁴³ and explores how the norms diffuse, are contested, and align with each other. This chapter draws on insights from the qualitative content analysis of the interview data.⁴⁴

The chapter is organised into four main sections to systematically examine the incorporation of global norms within the UNFCCC negotiations. First, it explores the broader normativity that characterises contemporary climate negotiations, drawing insights from theoretical frameworks and existing literature [*Section 4.1*].⁴⁵ Second, it examines the concept of normative overlaps, analysing how the eight identified global norms intersect, reinforce, and come into contestation within the complex ecosystem of climate governance [*Section 4.2*]. Third, it provides a detailed analysis of references to global norms in negotiations [*Section 4.3*], with dedicated subsections examining each of the eight norms: anti-fossil-fuel norms, climate justice norms, intergenerational equity norms, human rights norms, loss and damage norms, global earth stewardship norms, ecocide norms, and the principled idea of sufficiency. Each subsection traces how the respective norm is referenced across COP24–28 and analyses its diffusion within the UNFCCC COP negotiation processes, including an assessment of normative overlaps to demonstrate interconnections with other norms and emerging normative configurations. Finally, the chapter reflects on the broader patterns of normative evolution within climate negotiations, highlighting emerging dynamics/trends that shape how global norms are referenced, negotiated, and integrated.

⁴³ See *Chapter 3: Methodology*, to know how these norms were identified.

⁴⁴ See *Chapter 3: Methodology*, to know more about the Research Design

⁴⁵ See *Chapter 2: Review of Theory*, to know more of the theory and literature surrounding the analysis

4.1 Broader Normativity:

In the last three decades, climate science has driven the need for political consensus to ratchet up climate ambition (see Kinley *et al.*, 2021; Spaiser, Nisbett and Stefan, 2021; Ann Samuel, 2023; Maslin, Lang and Harvey, 2023; Nisbett and Spaiser, 2023). Scholars have studied how climate movements and transnational advocacy networks (TANs) permeate discourses within and around international climate change negotiations (Nisbett and Spaiser, 2023). While the rise of civil society is often linked to periods of democratic expansion (Betsill and Corell, 2007) there is a notable disruption of this trend.⁴⁶ Climate movements since mid-2000s have continually redefined the political environment (Crouzé, Godard and Meurs, 2024). They often challenge political causes that sustain intersectional vulnerabilities by force opening civic and democratic spaces to advance fundamental rights (see Ann Samuel, 2024c; Tigre, Muncott and Ann Samuel, 2025).

The importance of “social impetus” alongside negotiations—such as campaigns for anti-fossil fuel norms (Sikkink, 2024, p. 37) and climate movements for human right norms (see Beck *et al.*, 2015; Wallbott and Schapper, 2017)—remains significant. Accordingly, the ways in which global norms advanced by climate movements are referenced within international climate negotiations warrant closer attention.

In this regard, an interviewee—a United Nations official who has worked for the UNFCCC since its inception in 1990s—observed:

I think these normative arguments definitely have grown both in the formal and informal sense. In the formal sense, we [the UNFCCC] have programs under our processes of the Convention or of the Paris Agreement, like Action for Climate Empowerment and formal work programs on gender, Indigenous People. [...] And they, as programs themselves in the formal process, I think, are a way of, [...] accepting that there is a normative argument around these issues, whether it is the morality and ethics of it, or the concerns across generations. And then informally as well, when I sit in these negotiations every year for quite some hours, [...] the negotiators themselves, I would say, never measured it: but they're probably more often now referring to the same normative arguments in their own deliberations as opposed to 10 or 15, 20 years ago. So, I think, it becomes a norm almost, some of these normative arguments. That said, the actual decision text, as you've probably seen, that are taken, they're very carefully negotiated and sometimes they may not fully reflect, let's say, the breadth of expressions or feelings around the normative arguments. And probably, like many

⁴⁶ An increase in climate movements are observed despite the decline in democracy (see Bond, 2013; Young, 2015). Analysing the rise/fall of democracy is complex and nuanced. Scholars largely agree that democracy is on a steady decline in last two decades (see Vormann and Lammert, 2019; Repucci and Slipowitz, 2022), with democracy plummeting from years 2022 onwards (Freedom House, 2025).

things, you would come to a lower common denominator where everyone can agree. But during the oral discussions and deliberations, I hear a lot more than I did two decades ago. (Interview with IP09)

The importance of normative arguments within climate negotiations has intensified due to their *dual evolution*: i.e., formal and informal; which suggests a broadening normative framework for climate action that moves beyond purely scientific and economic frameworks. The relevance of the referenced global norms is particularly significant, as empirical data from the interviews suggests that negotiators increasingly invoke normative arguments during deliberations compared to previous decades.⁴⁷ This represents a notable shift in the culture of UNFCCC negotiations, although these normative elements are often diluted in the final decision texts (primarily the UNFCCC COP cover decisions) as a result of consensus-building processes.⁴⁸

Since negotiation outcomes are shaped by the contested political interests of 198 parties, incremental advances often conflict with the strong push for climate action from movements, TANs, public discourse, and even the scientific urgency surrounding the crisis. Stevenson highlights this mismatch among rhetoric, intentions, and actions—and characterises the contemporary era as "the age of bullshit" (2021, p. 86).

Examining the dynamics of the UNFCCC COP negotiations reveals that each norm operates within its own distinctive political configuration, marked by varying levels of state support, divergent motivations for endorsement or resistance, and differing instrumental strategies for advancing or contesting norms. For example, stretching diplomacy to build consensus in the negotiations by "bringing everyone to the table"⁴⁹ was observed for anti-fossil fuel norms diffusion.⁵⁰ By contrast, human rights norms have struggled to achieve inclusive participation among parties, despite sustained normative advocacy by civil society organisations and climate movements.⁵¹

Divisions persist regarding the advancement of global norms, even as broad normative claims are made in their support. For instance, Loss and Damage norms and Climate Justice norms

⁴⁷ According to the interviews with IP05, IP09, IP12, IP13, IP16

⁴⁸ See *Chapter 7: COP Negotiation Processes, The Cover Decisions, and Normative Gains* to read about the dynamics of what gets embedded from the negotiations.

⁴⁹ Interview with IP01

⁵⁰ Interview with IP01, IP06, IP11, IP13, IP15, IP20

⁵¹ Interview with IP03, IP04

have had long strides of advocacy yet their negotiation processes remain contentious. Delegates are frequently observed forming “huddles” during negotiations.⁵² Huddles are small groups that convene when a term/phrase or meaning of usage is controversial or ambiguous—where lead negotiators discuss alternative wording, test flexibility among parties, and seek consensus before returning to the plenary or negotiation rooms/halls. Such practices can facilitate progress on an agenda item or, conversely, stall normative arguments by blocking norms through procedural manoeuvring.⁵³ As one negotiator observed:

What I definitely see is that countries are moving to a more diverse and divided space. There is less and less effort to actually come to a conclusion. Countries like to apply Rule 16, which basically just postpones [decisions] for the next couple [of meetings]. Countries are having races to the bottom line. You're basically just finding a consensus on the least ambitious denominator instead of rising to the ambition to actually achieve the NDCs [Nationally Determined Contribution], the outline of the Paris Agreement, as well as what is written in the IPCC reports.”(Interview with IP13)

The UNFCCC’s draft Rules of Procedure, Rule 16 provides that an agenda item not concluded at one session automatically carried forward to the agenda of the following session (UNFCCC, 1996). Because the UNFCCC has operated for decades under draft (not fully adopted)⁵⁴ Rules of Procedure - Rule 16 (FCCC/CP/1996/2) has become an important fallback mechanism, ensuring that unresolved issues do not disappear. However, it can also be used as a procedural tactic: when parties cannot reach consensus or prefer not to close a topic definitively, they allow it to “roll over” to the next conference.

Under such plausible rollovers or intentional “huddles,” one interviewee highlighted a “race to the bottom line,”⁵⁵ where political consensus on advancing Nationally Determined

⁵² In the context of climate negotiations, such as those at the UNFCCC COPs, “huddles” are informal breakouts in which smaller groups of delegates or negotiators gather (often literally huddling in a corner of the room or in a hallway) to discuss specific points of contention or complex technical details. These gatherings are not part of the formal plenary sessions or scheduled working groups. Instead, they are spontaneous or semi-spontaneous side discussions aimed at resolving disagreements or refining language.

⁵³ An agenda item is a specific topic/issue listed in the formal meeting agenda of the UNFCCC COP that delegates need to address or decide upon during the negotiations. Each agenda item typically corresponds to a distinct area of discussion, mandate, or required action, such as: mitigation, adaptation actions, finance, technology development and transfer, capacity building, reporting and transparency requirements, administrative or procedural matters (e.g., reviewing rules of procedure etc.)

⁵⁴ UNFCCC’s Rules of Procedure remain in draft form and have never been formally adopted. The Rules of Procedure drafted in 1996 have never been adopted by the COP because of divergent views on Rule 42, which provides for two different options on decision-making under the Convention. As such, the parties agreed to apply the draft rules of procedure (FCCC/CP/1996/2), except draft Rule 42 on voting. Hence, even after three decades the Rules of Procedure remains a draft although they are applied at each COP session, as if they were adopted (see Depledge, 2024).

⁵⁵ Interview with IP13

Contributions (NDCs) often remains stalled. This has broader implications, as consensus in UNFCCC COP negotiations is abstract, contested, and continually debated (Nasiritousi *et al.*, 2024). Consensus in the UNFCCC climate negotiations operates by default rather than design, resulting from the failure to adopt formal rules of procedure since its inception (Depledge, 2024).

While consensus typically means—no stated objections—it lacks a clear operational definition and remains subject to the interpretation by the COP Presidency (Depledge, 2024). During preparations for COP1 in 1995, oil-producing countries—advised by fossil fuel lobbyists—deliberately blocked the adoption of a ‘last resort’ voting rule to preserve their ability to obstruct climate agreements (Depledge, 2024). Similarly, developed countries also resisted majority voting on financial matters, with the US and EU countries insisting on consensus for climate finance decisions to avoid being outvoted (Depledge, 2024). This dynamic has produced the “least ambitious denominator”⁵⁶—where decisions are frequently abandoned, diluted, or deferred due to objections from a small handful of countries, effectively granting them veto power (Depledge, 2024).

It is in this context that the influence of climate movements and TANs becomes evident, as they work to dismantle entrenched power imbalances within negotiations. Procedural justice remains paramount in the UNFCCC’s multilateralism (Okereke, 2010). Ensuring equitable access for both negotiators and observers in decision-making processes is therefore essential for procedural fairness and overall legitimacy (Jenkins *et al.*, 2016; Brandstedt and Brülde, 2019; Xie *et al.*, 2025). Negotiations *per se* are critiqued for embodying power imbalances and climate injustices; thus engagement from non-state actors and their inclusion through side events and more serve as key platforms for engagement, knowledge sharing, and capacity building—thus, enhancing legitimacy (see Schroeder and Lovell, 2012; Thew, 2018; Lefstad and Paavola, 2023; Xie *et al.*, 2025). Side events, in particular, address official negotiation topics and introduce issues before they appear on the formal agenda (Xie *et al.*, 2025); further, sustaining an iterative process of discussions on normative themes between negotiators and observers through common platforms like side-events, receptions, green zone, formal/informal meetings outside the UN space (of both Blue or Green Zones) and more, offering paths of influence for global norms on formal negotiations.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Interview with IP13

⁵⁷ Interview with IP01, IP06, IP12, IP13

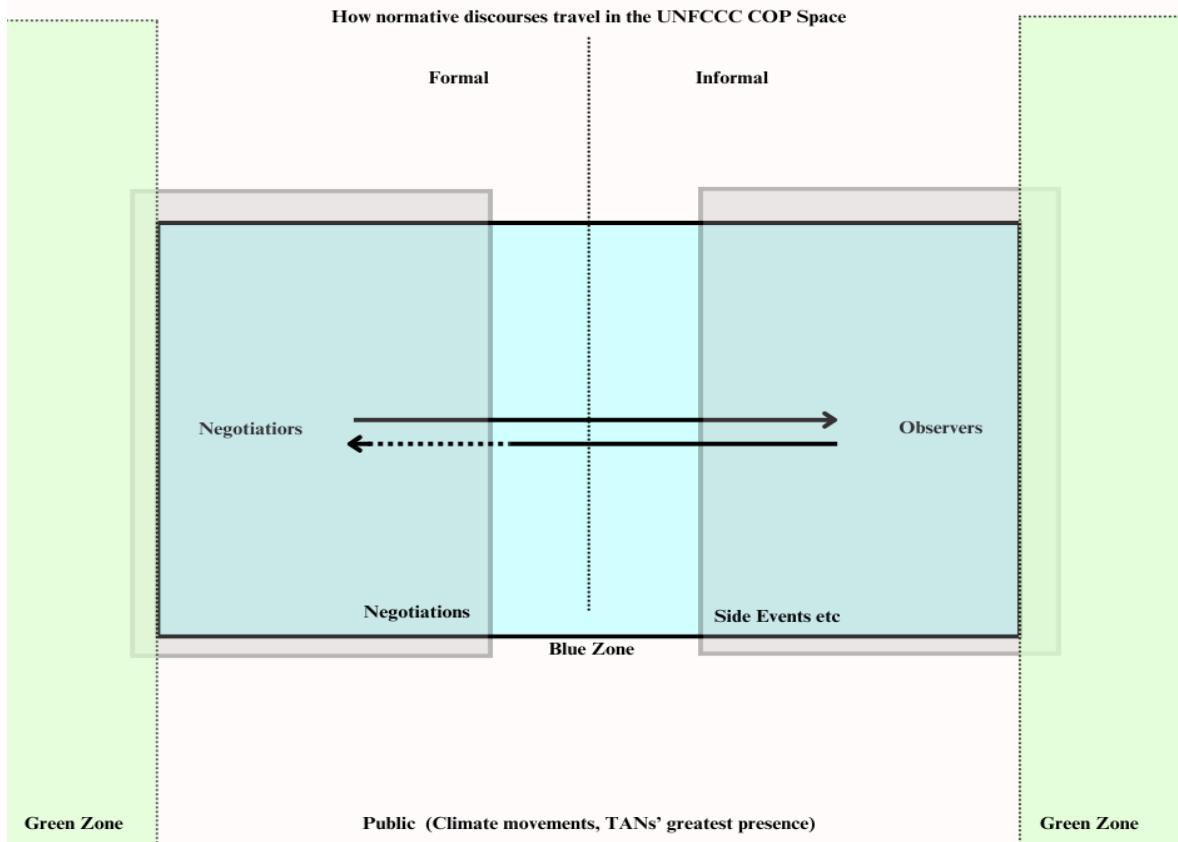


Figure. 4.1 A simplified illustration of the diffusion of normative discourses across the UNFCCC COP space (Created by Susan Ann Samuel)

Here, Figure 4.1 illustrates how normative discourses circulate within the UNFCCC COP negotiation space, showing the dynamic interplay and evolution of these discourses both formally and informally, within and around climate negotiations. The Blue Zone, represented by the light blue rectangular area, is the official negotiation space where accredited delegates, negotiators, and observers interact. It contains two main components: the formal "Negotiations" space on the left and the "Side Events etc." space on the right. The bidirectional arrows connecting "Negotiators" and "Observers," indicate the two-way exchange of normative arguments and discourses; in addition, the dotted lines from Observers to Negotiators indicate how observers can only 'observe' the formal negotiations. This visual representation aligns with how I analyse the "dual evolution" of normative arguments in climate negotiations—both formal and informal paths through which moral frameworks, justice concerns, and equity principles travel and intersect. The Green Zone on the periphery represents public spaces where climate movements and TANs have their strongest presence (Although I depict the Green Zone on both sides of the Blue Zone to emphasise its scale, there is in reality only one Green Zone).

Green Zone is open to the general public and serve as platforms for civil society engagement, demonstrations, and knowledge exchange. The positioning of these zones outside the formal Blue Zone but connected to it illustrates how external advocacy influences the official proceedings.

Normative discourses from formal and informal spaces travel between each other because of several interconnected reasons. First, civic and democratic expansion enables broader participation by diverse actors, facilitating the exchange of ideas and influencing the evolution of norms.⁵⁸ Second, civil society organisations, NGOs, and TANs play a critical role in mitigating power imbalances by advocating for enhanced procedural justice within multilateral processes.⁵⁹ Third, the positionality of spaces—including side events, the Blue Zone, the Green Zone, and the broader UN agenda-setting structure—creates multiple avenues through which norms are cross-fertilised and reshaped.⁶⁰ Fourth, consensus-building relies on the interaction between formal and informal spaces, where advocacy campaigns, such as those promoting anti-fossil fuel norms or integrating human rights into climate frameworks, generate pressure alongside negotiations (Sikkink, 2024, p. 37).⁶¹ Finally, informal spaces often serve as a counterbalance to procedural tactics employed in formal negotiations, ensuring that contested issues remain visible and subject to debate.⁶²

The Figure 4.1 thus shows how normative discourses traverse between observers and negotiators, creating an iterative process of discussions on normative themes. While the final negotiated texts might represent a formal process, the sustained advocacy flowing through these formal and informal channels enables an organic diffusion of global norms that gradually shifts the moral framework of climate governance toward gradual but greater attempts for recognition of justice, equity, and rights-based approaches.⁶³

4.2. Normative Overlaps:

The UNFCCC COP negotiations facilitate an ecosystem where normative themes frequently intersect, either reinforcing or contesting one another. Norms rarely exist in isolation (see

⁵⁸ Interview with IP20

⁵⁹ Interview with IP13, IP15, IP16

⁶⁰ Interview with IP01, IP13

⁶¹ Interview with IP04, IP06, IP14

⁶² Interview with IP01, IP13, IP19

⁶³ This shift is evidenced in the careful analysis that will follow in successive Chapters 5, 6 and 7.

Lantis and Wunderlich, 2018; Winston, 2018; Staunton and Ralph, 2020; Moore, 2025); hence rather, the effects of normative overlaps stem from the inherent tendency of norms to form clusters.⁶⁴ Climate movements and TANs are intertwined and dynamic, reflecting complexity of their organisational structures, normative agendas, and political engagements (see Bond, 2012; Hadden, 2015; Hadden and Jasny, 2019; Sevelsted and Toubøl, 2023).

The role of climate movements in catalysing normative overlaps is systematically examined in the subsequent sections of the chapter, alongside analyses of how each of the eight norms manifests within formal climate negotiation processes (from COP24-28). In this section, I identify two distinct patterns through which normative overlaps occur: first, through the actions of actors—such as strategic alliance-building and framing; and second, through the configuration of the norms themselves, as seen in the formation of meta-norms—which facilitates greater traction for advocacy by climate movements.

4.2.1 Strategic Alliance-building by Non-state Actors

When norms are contested, strategic alliance-building by non-state actors helps facilitate organic evolution of normative frameworks that intersect and overlaps.⁶⁵ In climate negotiations proactive and reactive contestation can both help in the diffusion of global norms (see Wiener, 2018, 2020)—where strategic alliances, or specific frames of advocacy grant them greater legitimacy, durability, and resilience (see Fehl, 2018; Lantis and Wunderlich, 2018; Fehl and Rosert, 2020). Alliance-building is bolstered by strategic (re)framing of norms frequently occur in tandem as complementary practices aimed at advancing advocacy objectives. This shows how individual norms are part of the broader structural context in which they exist and diffuse forward (Orchard and Wiener, 2024). For instance, anti-fossil fuel norms and their normative configurations show how actors advocating the same—build resilience through alliances and discursive practices: specifically, this involves shifting the discourse from purely technical considerations of emissions to broader moral framings of responsibility, thereby establishing new principles and standards within international climate governance.⁶⁶ (see Cheon and Urpelainen, 2018; Green, 2018, 2022; Kukkonen, 2018). Such reframing invokes moral principles such as the duty of care and the injunction to do no harm, alongside

⁶⁴ For literature around norm cluster, see *Chapter 2: Review of Theory - Section 2.2.1. Norm Clusters*

⁶⁵ For more analysis on framing, see *Chapter 5: Influence of Global Norms on Negotiations and Agreements – Section 5.2.1.2.1 Framings*.

⁶⁶ Interview with IP13; See *Chapter 4: Global Norms and International Climate Negotiations - Section 4.3.1 Anti-Fossil Fuel Norms*

human rights norms and climate science, thereby clustering anti-fossil fuel norms with broader human rights and equity frameworks and attracting non-state actors to coalesce around these intersecting themes. Similarly, the normativity of intergenerational equity norms inform by becoming another dimension of climate justice (Newell *et al.*, 2021). As such, emphasising obligations to future generations while providing moral foundations for anti-fossil fuel advocacy by framing continued extraction as an intergenerational ethical breach and a contradiction to justice⁶⁷ (Ann Samuel, 2023; Kotzé and Knappe, 2023). Again, loss and damage norms intersect with principles of fairness, historical responsibility, and intergenerational equity—addressing both economic and non-economic losses while complementing mitigation and adaptation approaches; thus creating normative overlaps.⁶⁸ Again, emerging ecocide norms create normative bridges to anti-fossil fuel advocacy by proposing accountability mechanisms for actions that knowingly exacerbate climate change.

In all these examples, strategic alliance building is observed coupled with strategic framing for political leverage.⁶⁹ While looking at strategic alliance building, it is helpful to comprehend what Moore coins as “norm weaving” (Moore, 2025)—where he expresses how actors arguably do not interact with single norms *per se*, instead, with norm clusters. Clusters may form organically from shared normative lineages or be deliberately constructed by norm entrepreneurs through strategic discourse (Lantis and Wunderlich, 2022; Moore, 2025). Thus, literature points to the practice of how actors engage in a process of selectively adapting and integrating components of existing norm clusters to form new, cohesive normative frameworks (Moore, 2025). In addition, Payne, (2001) emphasises that normative influence is shaped not only by message framing but by the broader communicative and normative environment in which such exchanges occur. As such, in normative overlaps where multiple norm clusters interact, norms can be selectively adapted, allowing principles from unrelated domains to be integrated into emerging clusters: shaped by actors’ strategic manipulation (Moore, 2025)—what Price describes as normative ‘grafting,’ reflecting both continuity and transformation (1998, p. 617).⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Interview with IP05

⁶⁸ Interview with IP06

⁶⁹ Interview with IP05, IP06

⁷⁰ See *Chapter 5: Influence of Global Norms on Negotiations and Agreements* to read more about norm entrepreneurs who make strategic alliances and networks for purposeful creation of norm clusters.

4.2.2 Meta-norms

The presence of meta-norms within norm clusters enhances the resilience of other norms. Scholars synonymise meta norms as broader normative meanings (see Deitelhoff and Zimmermann, 2019; Lawless et al., 2020; Krahmann and Podder, 2025). For instance, although climate justice embodies a tension between normative integration and operational clarity,⁷¹ its robustness is strengthened through its clustering with other norms: such as human rights norms, intergenerational equity, and/or loss and damage.⁷² As a result, climate justice norms not only gains legitimacy but also functions as a meta-norm characterised by flexibility—allowing actors to reinterpret or adapt its meaning to suit new contexts (Moore, 2025). Moore (2025) observes how this process includes actors shifting framing or emphasis to align with alternative policy objectives or moral imperatives.

In a similar vein, there are instances when human rights norms also operate as a meta-norm. Despite geopolitical realities and pro-active contestation in the interpretation of the meaning and usage of human rights⁷³ due to varied cultural interpretations—human rights norms, continue to strengthen broader normative principles of equity, just transition, gender, and indigenous rights. Consequently, simultaneously reinforced by external developments such as the UN recognition of the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment (Limon, 2022).

Likewise, Global Earth Stewardship, operates as a meta-norm, serving as a normative nexus connecting climate justice, equity, human rights, and biodiversity governance, while increasingly incorporating perspectives from Indigenous Peoples and youth. In doing so, it reinforces a moral and equity-based approach to environmental protection.⁷⁴ Similarly, principles of sufficiency are observed to align with norms that embody principles of equity and human rights, closely relating with indigenous knowledge systems and planetary boundaries while intersecting with justice-oriented principles.

Here, strategic alliance building, framing, and the role of meta-norms often go hand-in-hand together. For example, climate justice aids in the evolution of just transition: emphasising the need to ensure that climate policies do not marginalise workers and vulnerable communities

⁷¹ Interview with IP07

⁷² Interview with IP04, IP13

⁷³ Here, “pro-active” contestation refers to when actors engage with norms in order to improve them. (Wiener, 2018, 2020)

⁷⁴ Interview with IP01, IP04, IP13, IP15, IP20

but instead safeguard their well-being and inclusion.⁷⁵ The use of just transition is noted to be strategically used by the negotiators to align with the moral normative framing of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR):

But in recent years, just transition has been redefined [...] where developing countries have a little bit more time and space and can take longer. It is kind of another way of phrasing Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR), and that's why you often hear India and China now embracing just transition. In Paris, they didn't say anything; they couldn't care less [...] that's also why it ended up in the preamble. But now it is more of a concept for the world in general. The world has to transition in a just and fair way, which means that developed countries have to go first. And the whole "taking the lead" kind of thing is now baked into this concept of just transition. That's a complete evolution from Paris, where this was not the meaning at all. But this didn't happen due to civil society climate movements. That's something that came from some poor developing countries who saw this as an opportunity, saying, "Oh, now everybody's talking about just transition. It means it is just transition for our country.

(Interview with IP04)

According to the interviewee, this redefinition of "just transition" reconceptualises the term to justify extended transition timelines for developing countries while placing greater responsibility on developed countries to lead decarbonisation efforts. This linguistic transformation shows how terminologies in climate negotiations become contested terrain, where meanings are strategically reconfigured to advance specific national interests. As Grobe (2010, p. 5) notes, this underscores the "power of words" in argumentative persuasion within international negotiations. Similarly, civil societies or epistemic communities possess the discursive power to shape the frameworks within which negotiations unfold (Deitelhoff, 2009; Grobe, 2010).

While this interviewee highlights shifting semantic framings from the perspective of negotiators, there are multiple layers to how developing-country negotiators strategically align their persuasion with the normative framings of climate movements to strengthen claims of equity and historical responsibility. Thus, normative overlaps become evident where climate justice increasingly intersects with human rights, intergenerational equity, and just transition, positioning climate justice as a meta-norm embedded within broader justice frameworks. Such strategic alignment, particularly by developing countries and climate movements, reframes concepts like just transition to operationalise historical responsibility and equity, illustrating how norm meanings evolve within contested negotiation spaces.

⁷⁵ Interview with IP18

To sum, this section observed how normative overlaps within climate negotiations are neither incidental nor purely reactive. Rather, they emerge from deliberate actor strategies, e.g., alliance-building and framing; and from the structural presence of meta-norms that connect norm clusters—enhancing the resilience of individual norms in a cluster. By foregrounding the role of non-state actors and the dynamic configuration of norm clusters and constellations,⁷⁶ the analysis underscores that normative overlaps are constitutive features of the climate negotiation landscape. As such, it is analytically valuable to examine how individual global norms operate and evolve in the complex ecosystem of climate negotiations.

4.3 References of Global Norms in Negotiations

Building on the earlier discussion of broader normativity and the presence of normative overlaps within the UNFCCC COP negotiations, this section examines how the eight identified global norms are referenced in negotiation processes.⁷⁷ By “referenced,” I mean the ways in which these norms are introduced, invoked, or drawn upon during the negotiations. The global norms discussed in this section are: (1) Anti Fossil Fuel Norms (2) Climate Justice Norms (3) Intergenerational Equity Norms (4) Human Rights norms (5) Loss and Damage Norms (6) Global Earth Stewardship Norms (7) Ecocide Norms, and (8) the Principled Idea of Sufficiency (which has not yet crystallised into a fully recognised norm but is increasingly referenced in negotiations).⁷⁸

These global norms are interrelated and frequently coalesce in varying configurations, shaped by the influence of climate movements and the strategic positioning of states within international negotiations. References to one norm often carry overlapping implications for the diffusion, contestation, or advocacy of other norms as well. A comprehensive analysis must therefore account for what I describe as a dynamic normative “kaleidoscope”—one that is context-dependent and politically contingent, where norm/normative shifts in meaning and alignment are influenced by political context, actor interests, and negotiation settings.

Accordingly, each sub-section that follows, studies each of the eight global norms —exploring (1) how the norm diffuses in the negotiations, and (2) how it facilitates normative overlaps. It

⁷⁶ See literature around norm clusters and constellations, in *Chapter 2: Review on Theory*

⁷⁷ See *Chapter 3: Methodology* to learn how the eight norms were identified. To be specific, I've identified 7 norms and 1 principled idea (which is not a norm yet)—but for simplicity, I'm referring them together here.

⁷⁸ See *Chapter 1 Introduction – Section 1.2 Defining Norms and Climate Movements* to read what “principled idea” is.

should be here noted that while the section here focuses on discursive presence, semantic evolution, and normative overlaps.⁷⁹

4.3.1 Anti-Fossil Fuel norms

In the context of the UNFCCC negotiations, anti-fossil fuel norms are referenced in multiple, interconnected ways—both explicitly and implicitly. The subsection traces how these norms enter the negotiations, gain visibility, and shape discursive practices.

Climate movements recognise anti-fossil fuel norms as moral norms with standards prescribing the gradual elimination and eventual prohibition of all practices associated with the fossil fuel value chain, from financing through extraction, processing, and consumption (Blondeel, 2019; Blondeel, Colgan and Van de Graaf, 2019).⁸⁰ These norms derive their legitimacy from moral and ethical claims rather than from considerations of efficiency, cost, or economic gain (Olsen and March, 2004; Green, 2018a, 2018b). Increasingly, youth, civil society organisations, and indigenous groups frame ongoing fossil fuel extraction as directly linked to climate injustice and human rights violations.⁸¹ By doing so, they have labelled fossil fuels as “harm” and “injustice” rather than drivers of industrial growth and economic expansion.⁸² Historically, during the era of decolonisation, fossil fuels were seen as central to economic growth and the means by which states could escape poverty—a narrative that continues to persist in many regions today. Yet, there is a growing normative shift toward clean energy, renewables, and a just transition as the foundation of sustainable socio-economic development.

Between 2018 and 2023 (COP24-28) the number of states and citizens embracing and negotiating in favour of anti-fossil fuel norms have increased, with actors such as European Union, Small Island Developing States (SIDS)⁸³ taking prominent positions. Given the growing salience of these norms, non-compliance increasingly carried reputational costs, further spreading their influence (Green, 2018a). Even so, I note here that in 2024-2025, a drastic regression and fragmentation is observed in overall climate action, particularly in the

⁷⁹ This analysis should be distinguished from that in *Chapter 5: Influence of Global Norms on Negotiations and Agreements* which examines the “influence” of each norm more substantively—i.e., how these norms shape negotiation outcomes and agenda-setting processes through the actions of climate movements and transnational advocacy networks acting as norm entrepreneurs

⁸⁰ As to how the thesis defines Anti Fossil Fuel Norms, see *Chapter 3: Methodology – Section 3.1 Research Design*

⁸¹ Interview with IP12

⁸² Interview with IP12

⁸³ Interview with IP04, IPO7, IPO8

diffusion of anti-fossil fuel norms (UNEP, 2023b; Milman *et al.*, 2024). However, since the thesis focuses from 2018-2024, let me proceed with my analysis of this time period.⁸⁴

Across COP24 to COP28, the UNFCCC's approach to fossil fuels shifted from avoiding explicit references to actively naming and acknowledging them. As one interviewee observed:

Clearly, in the last few years, there has been a movement to integrate provisions or texts on fossil fuels at the COP. It started with COP 26 and the Glasgow Climate Pact, with its call for phasing down unabated coal. Now, we have COP 28 in Dubai with the call for transitioning away from fossil fuels. (Interview with IP07)

Despite fossil fuels being central to the climate crisis, they were rarely named explicitly in UNFCCC texts prior to COP26. Instead, references were restricted to broader terms such as “mitigation” and “emissions reductions”⁸⁵ due to political sensitivities and resistance from fossil fuel-producing countries. One interviewee expressed frustration:

I mean, I think eventually it would have to happen that there would be a COP outcome that used the words “fossil fuels.” And I think we should all be shocked and mortified that it took 30 years. (Interview with IP03)

Acknowledging the slowness of the process, another interviewee reflected on the incremental progression in referencing anti-fossil fuel norms:

If we go back to COP 26 in Glasgow, I think that is where we saw a moment where we started talking about coal and fossil fuel subsidies through to Sharm El-Sheikh and then on to Dubai. So, the last three COPs progressively, from the point of view of the process and the outcomes, we progressed in dealing with this issue of fossil fuels. It is not a very rapid progression. I mean, I don't think we're still accepting the fact that we need to be fully out of coal within the next few years. (Interview with IP09)

While COP26 in Glasgow marked a turning point, the final text cautiously phrased “phasing down unabated coal” rather than “phasing out”,⁸⁶ and it was the first time coal power and fossil fuel subsidies were explicitly addressed—signalling a shift in normative discourse. This momentum continued post-COP26, with COP28, in particular, expanding the focus from coal and “inefficient fossil fuel subsidies”⁸⁷ to broader discussions on “transitioning away from fossil fuels.”⁸⁸ Yet, the shifting interests in these discussions are evident in the debate over terms like “phasing out” versus “phasing down”, with some countries firmly opposing the former. Observing the emphasis on “transition(ing)”, it becomes clear that the focus is on a

⁸⁴ See *Chapter 8 - Conclusion*, to read about future research avenues

⁸⁵ Interview with IP10

⁸⁶ See *Chapter 7: COP Negotiation Processes, The Cover Decisions, and Normative Gains – Section 7.1.3 COP26*

⁸⁷ Decision 1/CP.26 Paragraph 20

⁸⁸ Decision 1/CMA.5 Paragraph 28 (d)

dynamic, adaptable approach that reflects each country's needs.⁸⁹ This includes addressing how to manage the transition effectively, overcoming barriers to ensure it is just, politically viable, and economically feasible'.⁹⁰

COP28 in Dubai was hosted by a petrostate and led by fossil-linked presidency, underscoring mounting concerns over greenwashing and vague rhetoric around a "transition to green energy"⁹¹ (Carrington, 2023). While anti-fossil fuel activism has gained global momentum, fossil fuel production and consumption continue to increase, posing significant risks to achieving climate goals (Green, 2022).

These dynamics highlight the urgent need for coordinated policies and shared implementation strategies, a challenge reminiscent of Kyoto Protocol-era debates. While common global policies have proven arguably impractical due to diverse national interests and legislative hurdles, plurilateral cooperation among smaller groups of countries (i.e., like in BRICS, ASEAN, EU, G20, G77 summits) are observed to increase—even influencing common stands for negotiations.⁹² Such alliances have influenced common negotiation positions to overcome barriers, reduce fears of rapid policy shifts, and foster mutual support mechanisms. Industrial policies, such as European Union's carbon border adjustments, show such trend, highlighting a shift toward government-led strategies.⁹³

At the same time, these developments link anti-fossil fuel norms directly to discourses around just transition—recognising that phasing out fossil fuels must be accompanied by policies that ensure socio-economic fairness, including protecting labour rights, providing new green jobs, and ensuring universal access to clean energy, particularly in developing countries; thus, reiterating how:

Ending fossil fuels isn't straightforward [...] The climate justice movement has highlighted these debates but also revealed their complexity. Managing climate action is challenging because it touches on diverse and deeply rooted interests. (Interview with IP16)

⁸⁹ See *Chapter 7: COP Negotiation Processes, The Cover Decisions, and Normative Gains*

⁹⁰ Interview with IP16

⁹¹ Interview with IP17; This was compounded with COP29 being hosted in Baku, Azerbaijan—another petrostate.

⁹² It can be explained that BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa), ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations), EU (European Union), the G20 (consisting of Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Turkey, United Kingdom, United States, and the European Union), and G77 (which is now 134 developing nations) have its own gatherings/summits and as such offer plausible climate pathways through state-policy coordination.

⁹³ Interview with IP16

The complexity of fossil fuel transitions within contemporary climate governance becomes evident when climate movements foreground equity-based arguments for a fossil fuel phase-out while simultaneously exposing the multifaceted challenges of achieving decarbonisation. The reference to "diverse and deeply rooted interests"⁹⁴ suggests that fossil fuel dependency transcends mere economic considerations, encompassing embedded socio-political structures, energy security concerns, and differentiated national circumstances that resist straightforward policy solutions. This complexity reflects the tension between normative imperatives for rapid decarbonisation and the practical realities of managing transitions across heterogeneous political economies with varying capacities, vulnerabilities, and historical responsibilities for climate change.

4.3.1.1 Normative overlaps:

A significant focus of the activism promoting anti-fossil fuel norms lies in reshaping moral narratives to challenge the legitimacy of fossil fuels and the industry that produces them (Cheon and Urpelainen, 2018; Green, 2018, 2018, 2022; Nisbett and Spaiser, 2023). Establishing new moral global norms involve more than just opposing harmful practices or challenging the status quo. It requires a deliberate process of discursive change, where proponents actively work to (re)frame narratives to make the desired behaviours appear normal and, in doing so, displace the practices they seek to contest (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998; Sandholtz, 2017).

Scholars describe these struggles as "discursive battles" in climate politics where language shifts from technical discussions about emissions to moral framings of responsibility, often foregrounding ethical justifications (Kukkonen, 2018, p.4). A negotiator observed:

At COP 28, fossil fuels was one of the main topics, but many negotiators are completely overwhelmed. We have heads of delegations who told us they've never intervened because they don't know how to intervene or engage with their grouping—and these are big countries who actually have something to say in these negotiations. [...] There is crucial work done by people who translate and build bridges, who come up with specific language informed by climate justice—what it actually means for the mitigation of greenhouse gases, loss and damage fund or global adaptation when applied through gender, intersectional, youth, and indigenous perspectives. (Interview with IP13)

Negotiators, despite having conflicting interests due to their positions within states that depend economically on fossil fuels—increasingly frame their interventions within moral normative discourses. Within such framing, multiple norms intersect when viewed through gendered,

⁹⁴ Interview with IP16

intersectional, youth, and Indigenous perspectives. For example, the moral framing of anti-fossil fuel norms frequently overlaps with discourses on loss and damage, as one narrative emphasises:

Fossil fuels are specifically linked to loss and damage [...] this narrative is about hurt, about inflicting harm onto people and territories. (Interview with IP11)

As such,

...more and more states come to these negotiations having realised that the fossil era is moving towards its end, but it is an uphill battle. (Interview with IP04)

Similarly, Green (2022) highlights how most campaigns diffusing anti-fossil fuel norms focus on local actions and are framed around local identities, which limits their potential to spread to regions with different identities or scale up to broader levels of action. In response to this limitation, transnational advocacy groups strategically (re)frame the discourse by linking anti-fossil fuel norms to other established norms under broader normative frameworks, thereby building resilience for these emerging norms during international negotiations.

4.3.2 Climate Justice norms

Although the interpretation of climate justice varies across contexts and communities IPCC recognises three core principles: *distributive justice*, concerning how benefits and burdens are shared among individuals, nations, and generations; *procedural justice*, relating to inclusive and participatory decision-making; and *recognition justice*, which emphasises respect for and meaningful engagement with diverse cultures, identities, and worldviews (2022, p. 7).⁹⁵

Contemporary understandings of climate justice are largely shaped by its dual role: first, within the procedural and governance dimensions of the UNFCCC, particularly negotiations and official texts; and second, through the influence of grassroots movements that engage alongside these international processes (see Bond, 2013; Schlosberg and Collins, 2014; Gach, 2019).

Climate justice norms aim to address and redress historical legacies of colonialism and marginalisation by foregrounding equity-based considerations. These considerations inform the diffusion of other norms and underpin key demands, such as equitable access to climate finance, recognition of Indigenous knowledge systems, capacity-building, intergenerational justice, and the participation of vulnerable communities in climate governance. An interviewee

⁹⁵ As to how the thesis defines Climate Justice Norms, see *Chapter 3: Methodology – Section 3.1 Research Design*

underscores this alignment succinctly: “...equity, justice, and fairness, this is the heart of climate justice.”⁹⁶

Given that understandings of climate justice are shaped by diverse ethical frameworks and lived experiences, power dynamics have emerged as a central concern within climate justice discourse (Newell *et al.*, 2021; Lefstad and Paavola, 2023). Negotiations within the UNFCCC are often characterised by significant power asymmetries (Thew, Middlemiss and Paavola, 2020). In response to these dynamics, climate movements have played a strategic role in framing climate justice in ways that challenge dominant structures and reconfigure power relations within international negotiations. *Partzsch*, (2017) identifies three distinct forms of power: *collaborative power*, which is rooted in collective learning and mutual awareness; *agentic power*, defined as the capacity to act and bring about change; and *dominative power*, which involves shaping or constraining others' behaviours and perceptions through institutional, structural, or discursive means. Climate justice movements and/or TANs promoting climate justice norms embody these dimensions: they foster collaborative power through processes of shared learning and solidarity;⁹⁷ they exercise agentic power by enabling civil society organisations to act meaningfully within the UNFCCC space;⁹⁸ and they engage in dominative power by challenging prevailing narratives and influencing the terms of debate within climate negotiations.⁹⁹

In early years of UNFCCC negotiations, climate justice was largely implicit, reflected through principles like Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR) and equity (Lefstad and Paavola, 2023). A negotiator notes how these principles were prominently advocated by the Global South, Small Island Developing States (SIDS), and Least Developed Countries (LDCs), who consistently emphasised fairness, historical responsibility, and vulnerability although the term *climate justice* rarely appeared in formal texts.

The emphasis on 1.5 degrees has always been a key message of island states and least developed countries, but it is been amplified massively by climate justice movements in recent years. (Interview with IP16)

COP15 in Copenhagen exposed procedural injustices and elite-driven dynamics that undermined trust in the negotiation process (see Muller, 2010; Rajamani, 2010). The diffusion

⁹⁶ Interview with IP06

⁹⁷ Interview with IP13

⁹⁸ Interview with IP01, IP04, IP16, IP17

⁹⁹ Interview with IP01, IP04, IP05, IP13, IP20

of climate justice norms increased substantively by COP19 in Warsaw (2013), particularly through the establishment of the *Warsaw International Mechanism on Loss and Damage* (see Rajamani, 2014; UNFCCC, 2016). The discourse matured further at COP21 in Paris (2015), where climate justice was explicitly mentioned in the Agreement's preamble, though notably excluded from its binding provisions (Lefstad and Paavola, 2023). Yet, despite persistent references climate justice by vulnerable states and civil society organisations—a prioritisation of market mechanisms, illustrated a gap between discourse and institutional outcomes (Fuhr, Schalatek and Verolme, 2016).

Post-Paris, references to human rights, Indigenous Peoples, and vulnerable communities became more prominent in climate discourse, establishing stronger connections to climate justice.¹⁰⁰ Yet, the concept of climate justice itself remained abstract and contested in climate negotiations.¹⁰¹ Climate justice as a term and concept often entered the negotiations due to persistent transnational advocacy networks—vividly, civil society actors, youth groups, indigenous people, and NGOs.¹⁰² These movements framed climate change not just as an environmental or technical issue, but as one deeply connected to social justice, human rights, and equity.

From COP26-28, climate justice became more visible in side events, observer interventions, and negotiations,¹⁰³ with key milestones like the agreement on *Loss and Damage Fund* at COP27 Sharm el-Sheikh, and its operationalisation at COP28 in UAE where the momentum for loss and damage under the title of climate justice has been a long-standing advocacy.¹⁰⁴ This highlights the recognition of equitable responsibilities and vulnerable communities, even as debates continued over the practical implementation of climate justice. That said, throughout negotiations, movements are observed to continue to exert pressure: especially from observers in the negotiation spaces¹⁰⁵ through submissions and active participation for positive outcomes.

4.3.2.1 Normative overlaps:

¹⁰⁰ Interview with IP04, IP05, IP06

¹⁰¹ Interview with IP07

¹⁰² Interview with IP01

¹⁰³ Side events in UNFCCC negotiations are parallel sessions held alongside the formal negotiations at COPs or other UNFCCC meetings. They are organised by governments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), intergovernmental organisations (IGOs), research institutions, and other stakeholders, these events serve as platforms for discussing issues related to climate change.

¹⁰⁴ Interview with IP14

¹⁰⁵ Interview with IP03

Climate justice is closely intertwined with human rights (Gach, 2019; Ann Samuel, 2024b, 2026a). The interviews underscore that just climate solutions must consider human rights obligations, including the right to a healthy environment, equitable participation in decision-making, and protection of vulnerable communities. Often climate justice norms diffuse also in references to moral obligation to future generations. Intergenerational equity and advocacy around it is propelled through transnational advocacy groups, helping align climate justice norms with norms of intergenerational equity and justice (Spaiser, Nisbett and Stefan, 2022; Ann Samuel, 2023; Kotzé and Knappe, 2023). An interviewee expresses how, even when global norms are observed to be referenced and integrated into the UNFCCC processes, significant challenges persist:

Well, I think those concepts are all, you know, just transition, fossil fuel phase-out, climate justice, those phrases are all very prominent in the negotiations and certainly have been prominent for quite a while. The problem is, there is this just there continues to be such a massive gap between what is needed and what is being done that those phrases begin to feel like they're not capable of catalysing the changes that are needed. Well, that just comes back to our earlier conversation about, you know, the power of the fossil fuel industry and [...] its state allies, which is just so, so difficult to, well, it is not difficult to challenge, but it is difficult to make progress because of their power.

(Interview with IP05)

The power dynamics encompassing North-South equity,¹⁰⁶ indigenous rights,¹⁰⁷ gender justice,¹⁰⁸ and future generations¹⁰⁹—leads to varied interpretations, complicating its translation into actionable decisions. This engenders what the interviewee described as the "massive gap"¹¹⁰ between concept and implementation.

Climate justice is also observed to strengthen the local agency of countries and communities (Minnella, Pathak and Scauso, 2024)—as a meta-norm, the normative discourses around it overlaps with those of other norms like human rights, intergenerational equity. As such, climate justice uniquely positions itself as a lens to see other “justice” narratives.

For instance, Belize, like much of the Caribbean, has a strong conservation ethos rooted in its natural patrimony, as stressed by an interviewee while speaking about climate justice. This is evident in its moratorium on offshore oil exploration and efforts to protect the largest Barrier Reef in the Western Hemisphere. Since gaining independence in 1981, Belize has integrated

¹⁰⁶ Interview with IP14

¹⁰⁷ Interview with IP03

¹⁰⁸ Interview with IP13

¹⁰⁹ Interview with IP12, IP13, and 1P20

¹¹⁰ Interview with IP05

protected areas into its development strategy, emphasizing environmental protection as crucial for sustainability. A strong Indigenous rights movement led by the Mayan community has further shaped national policies, prompting the government to form a commission to safeguard their rights. An interviewee, opined how each country's unique context and challenges influence its positions and policy frameworks.¹¹¹ Belize's environmental priorities, for instance, appear in its Horizon 2030 objectives (see Barnett, Catzim-Sanchez and Humes, 2011).

At the same time, external factors, like participation in the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS)—reinforce a climate justice perspective. The 1989 Malé Declaration recognised the vulnerability of Small Island Developing States to climate change, effectively promoting cooperation and prioritising the protection of the most at-risk populations. This broader alliance has shaped the technical advice Belize provides to its policymakers, showing that both internal commitments and external partnerships guide national approaches to climate justice. This also highlights how norms in the international and domestic political spheres are constantly in dynamic loop or (re)interpretation under varying normative overlaps.

4.3.3 Intergenerational Equity norms

Norms around intergenerational equity and justice have long been associated with sustainable development and have gradually become integrated into the climate regime, gaining formal recognition in the preamble of the Paris Agreement (see Cordonier Segger, 2021; Atapattu and von Rosing, 2025). Although UNCCC does not explicitly reference “intergenerational equity” in its Convention, Article 3 (1) captures the principle by recognising the need to “protect the climate system for the benefit of present and future generations of humankind, on the basis of equity and in accordance with their common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities” (UNFCCC, 1992b). The principle of “equity” thus serves as a conduit for advancing intergenerational equity norms, often intersecting with broader climate justice norms.

The Paris Agreement text does not mention “youth”, whereas “children” and “intergenerational equity” are mentioned.¹¹² This inclusion amounts to a normative advancement, positing the obligation to consider future generations within the global climate discourse (Caney, 2018; Mayer, 2021; Knappe and Renn, 2022; Ann Samuel, 2024c). However, this inclusion remains

¹¹¹ Interview with IP11

¹¹² Decision 1/CP.21 (Preamble) and Decision 1/CP.21 - Annex (i.e., the Paris Agreement)

largely symbolic, with limited operational mechanisms to ensure its application in decision-making processes. What remains important is how, beyond the UNFCCC COP spaces, there is a radical push for intergenerational equity and justice, which in turn is influencing the COP negotiations. In this regard, the interviewee from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights speaks of the different intersecting avenues where advocacy for intergenerational justice is noted:

We have the Summit for the Future at the UN in September¹¹³, and there are developments in this space that are different now in terms of scale. The Pact for the Future¹¹⁴ is being negotiated, and there is meant to be a declaration on the rights of future generations as part of the Secretary-General's Summit for the Future. Some of these developments might be related to the role of youth. In the litigation space, youth and children have been really impactful as petitioners. Some successful cases, like *Held v. Montana*¹¹⁵ in the US and *Neubauer, et al. v. Germany*¹¹⁶ are driven by child or youth plaintiffs. The Convention on Rights of Children (CRC) recently released a general comment on children's rights and the environment and heard a complaint by child and youth petitioners through its optional protocol. (Interview with IP03)

After the Paris Agreement in 2015, the *Glasgow Climate Pact* in COP26 in 2021 signalled further progress, explicitly encouraging youth participation and incorporating intergenerational equity into broader discussions. While this demonstrated an increasing acknowledgment of the role of younger generations, one of the interviewees who was a negotiator observed how much of their engagement has been criticised as "performative"¹¹⁷; often considered as symbolic gestures rather than substantive influences on negotiations.¹¹⁸

The growing presence of youth movements, represented by constituencies like YOUNGO (the youth NGO constituency at UNFCCC COPs) and initiatives such as youth pavilions, reflects a normative shift where intergenerational equity is no longer abstract but personified by young delegates and activists actively participating in negotiations, either as observers or even young

¹¹³ Summit of the Future 2024 happened in 21-24 September 2024 in New York; The Summit is a high-level event of the United Nations, bringing world leaders together to forge a new international consensus on how we deliver a better present and safeguard the future.

¹¹⁴ World leaders adopt a Pact for the Future that includes a Global Digital Compact and a Declaration on Future Generations (A/RES/79/1). The Pact covers a broad range of themes, including peace and security, sustainable development, climate change, digital cooperation, human rights, gender, youth and future generations, and the transformation of global governance.

¹¹⁵ *Held v. Montana*, No. CDV-2020-307 (Mont. 1st Jud. Dist. Ct. Aug. 14, 2023)

¹¹⁶ *Neubauer et al. v. Germany*, 1 BvR 2656/18 (BVerfG Mar. 24, 2021)

¹¹⁷ Interview with IP08

¹¹⁸ Interview with IP01

negotiators (Ann Samuel and Nestor, 2024). This shift has been reinforced by external legal developments, such as the Inter-American Court of Human Rights' references to intergenerational equity and the rights of the child, which have provided a rights-based foundation to advocate for stronger protections for future generations within climate policy.¹¹⁹ The interviewee emphasised the Inter-American Court of Human Rights ruling on industrial pollution in Peru. The case, *La Oroya v. Peru* (2024) though not focused on climate change *per se*, strongly affirmed intergenerational equity, children's rights, and the right to a healthy environment (Boyd, 2024; Kopas and Peña L, 2024). This highlights the growing acceptance of these principles at a major regional human rights body: a good sign for the Court's forthcoming advisory opinion on the climate emergency. However, despite the increased visibility of rights-based approaches and intergenerational equity in climate talks, the interviewee stresses how most governments still have not translated these obligations into urgent, ambitious climate policies.¹²⁰ Moreover, vulnerable states, particularly those facing existential threats like rising sea levels and loss of arable land, have drawn on intergenerational equity to emphasise the *moral* imperative of addressing climate impacts for both present and future communities.¹²¹ An interviewee emphasised that while platforms have helped youth movements, their lobbying—especially during politically challenging times—has been key in creating space for greater climate ambition, though not equally across all regions.¹²² Youth activists' growing technical expertise and procedural know-how enable them to shape negotiation language and maintain pressure on delegations, both before and during COP sessions.¹²³ Further, speaking about a recent first-hand experience, when in the 6th United Nations Environment Assembly in Nairobi, he saw how the children and youth group effectively influenced each resolution to align with their objectives.¹²⁴ Rights discourse and intergenerational equity are increasingly recognised in climate negotiations, yet their translation into substantive political outcomes remains limited. While vulnerable states effectively deploy moral arguments and youth participation has personified abstract equity concepts, a significant implementation gap persists. Interview data reveals a pattern where normative shifts outpace political commitments. Rights-based frameworks provide moral authority and procedural influence but fail to overcome dominant political calculations. This

¹¹⁹ Interview with IP05

¹²⁰ Interview with IP05

¹²¹ Interview with IP01

¹²² Interview with IP02

¹²³ Interview with IP02

¹²⁴ Interview with IP02

discourse is thus primarily reshaping the normative themes in a forward-facing and proactive basis, rather than ratcheting up political will amongst parties in climate negotiations.

In such a mismatch of normative themes futureproofing climate negotiations rather than facilitating the present political stances, negotiators play a crucial intermediary role; often in championing intergenerational equity norms— influenced by personal convictions and public pressure from youth movements. Many negotiators, moved by empathy for their own children or inspired by the moral clarity of youth delegates, seek to listen to their advocacy but make it clear how there are no tangible effects *per se*. In the words of the negotiator youth put “a face on the future”:

I don't know that I would say that well. Fridays for Future, I think, it is been striking to me how much, particularly European people, have mentioned Greta Thunberg and the youth movement and so forth. And so maybe it has intangible ways for them. I would say probably not. I don't think it is so much tangible. But I do think that there are intangible aspects to it, you know, to having these things happen. A lot of us [negotiators] have kids that matters, and I spend a lot of time at the COPs engaging with the youth delegates from the US and you know, and we think every one of us is in some way moved by their presence. In other words, you know, they put a face on the future; maybe that's the way to put it. And I think that matters. I, don't think, not in terms of specific positions *per se*, but you know, kind of overall orientation about why we're working and who we're working for, if that makes sense. (Interview with IP18)

While substantive outcomes in core treaty texts were rare, incremental gains appeared in softer, non-binding forms such as the *Glasgow Climate Pact*, which acknowledged youth as decision-makers, reflecting negotiators’ responsiveness to moral political pressure.¹²⁵

Despite these advances, it remains a challenge to integrate fully intergenerational equity into negotiation texts and binding agreements. While youth participation has increased, decision-making processes often fail to reflect their perspectives substantively. For instance, language surrounding intergenerational justice in COP decisions has been critiqued as lacking actionable commitments, with parties reluctant to adopt binding measures that fully account for future generations.¹²⁶ This gap underscores the tension between the symbolic and practical dimensions of intergenerational equity.

There are also limits to the advocacy for intergenerational equity. Some interviewees observed how intergenerational equity norms are not as influential as they are understood to be:

¹²⁵ Interview with IP20

¹²⁶ Interview with IP01

But I would think that notions such as intergenerational equity are probably not that influential, except as a rhetorical device in creating some sort of pressure or an additional moral argument to act. But I think at the end of the day, given the current climate, it is not likely to have a significant impact on the policy of governments, even if it has an impact on public consciousness. (Interview with IP17)

However, the moral argument as a rhetoric aids in normative overlaps—where purposeful norm clusters bolster resilience of other norms through intergenerational equity. Thus, intergenerational equity helps in compounding influences.¹²⁷

4.3.3.1 Normative overlaps:

Intergenerational equity intersects with key normative frameworks in the climate negotiations space, reinforcing its centrality to human rights, climate justice, loss and damage, and anti-fossil fuel norms. Closely tied to human rights, it emphasises the obligation to safeguard children's rights as with General Comment 26 of Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 2023) and the right to a clean healthy and sustainable environment, framing climate inaction as a violation of these fundamental rights.¹²⁸

Hence, although intergeneration equity norms are a norm itself, it often has close alignment to climate justice. As a dimension of climate justice, intergenerational equity addresses the moral responsibility to prevent unjust burdens on future generations. Youth movements have amplified this narrative, shifting the focus from immediate impacts to the broader injustices of failing to act decisively on climate change in the present.¹²⁹ Similarly, the norm supports robust loss and damage mechanisms, arguing that future generations should not inherit the unresolved consequences of today's emissions. Increasingly, loss and damage frameworks reflect this perspective by incorporating references to children's rights and intangible generational losses.¹³⁰ However, an interviewee observed how the push by youth movements aligned more with mitigation as opposed to adaptation or loss and damage, emphasising implicitly how the movements had a broader political implication as opposed to producing targeted effects for specific norms (e.g. loss and damage):

[...] The youth movement has been in support of progress, but more following a direction of developments we've seen in the mitigation space, particularly on the road towards COP 26. (Interview with IP02)

¹²⁷ See *Chapter 5 Influence of Global Norms on Negotiations and Agreements* to read more about influences and how norm entrepreneurs' advocacy for intergenerational equity in particular is analysed.

¹²⁸ Interview with IP05

¹²⁹ Interview with IP05

¹³⁰ Interview with IP15

Intergenerational equity also strengthens anti-fossil fuel norms, where youth-led advocacy highlights the moral hazard of continued fossil fuel reliance. By framing fossil fuel use as a threat to the well-being of future generations, activists have transformed what is often seen as a political debate that has been disavowed—into a moral and generational issue, demanding urgent action to phase out harmful energy sources.¹³¹ Together, these alignments demonstrate how intergenerational equity transcends standalone discussions, embedding itself within broader frameworks of justice, human rights, and sustainability in climate governance.

4.3.4 Human Rights norms

Before the Paris Agreement, there were no explicit references to human rights norms in the UNFCCC process. Albeit principles like equity and Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR) indirectly touched on justice, human rights were seen as too politically charged for direct inclusion. The Paris Agreement in COP21 (2015) marked a turning point by including a reference to human rights in its preamble (just like with the climate justice norms), highlighting obligations to respect, promote, and consider human rights, Indigenous Peoples' rights, and intergenerational equity. However, this inclusion resulted from intense negotiation and compromise, as stronger, operative language faced resistance from authoritarian states or governments states prioritising national sovereignty over normative commitments to human rights. As a negotiator noted:

But then you had states like Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and a couple of others, United States as well, saying no to human rights. There is no place in the Paris Agreement, forget about it. That's a climate agreement, not a human rights agreement. And so, it went back and forth, and there were different drafts where human rights were bracketed in the operational text. And then I made the suggestion to have it in the preamble. And I was, I was, almost killed by civil society for that. But it was the only way to save a place for human rights because the chances were high it would otherwise fall out entirely. So, Norway made the intervention saying, well, you know, we would propose, or we would support a reference to human rights in the preamble. And, you know, civil society made this enormous outcry. But then the question was how to refer to human rights. And then I worked a lot with Saudi Arabia and everyone who didn't, China, in particular, who didn't want to see any reference to human rights. (Interview with IP04)

Such persistent advocacy by negotiators working alongside civil society organisations and parties ensured human rights would feature in the preamble of the Paris Agreement, laying the groundwork, at least, for future progress around inclusion of rights within official documents.

¹³¹ Interview with IP11

After the Paris Agreement, the integration of human rights norms into UNFCCC negotiations progressed incrementally and indirectly, with the preamble serving as a reference point. But stronger commitments proved elusive since the incorporation of the language of human rights saw (and is seeing) a growing resistance from some member states:

When it comes to human rights... developments within the UNFCCC... have been fairly limited, with some member states growing more and more resistant to any mention of human rights in those particular spaces. (Interview with IP02)

The way in which the right to a clean healthy and sustainable environment has brought more consensus to human rights norms within the UNFCCC COP negotiations is noteworthy.¹³² The incorporation of human rights in the Paris Agreement laid the groundwork for its broader recognition. Subsequent discussions have increasingly framed the right to a healthy environment as central to climate policy, as reflected in the Paris preamble and reinforced by references to this right in the context of climate change. Particularly, the complementarity of climate movements and transnational advocacy groups around the push for the right to a healthy environment in climate negotiations is observed.¹³³

International bodies, such as the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, have further legitimised and clarified this right, making strong connections between environmental health and human rights obligations in climate governance. They also underline how youth and children are becoming a force for the same.¹³⁴

[...] because human rights law provides a variety of institutions and processes for holding States and to a lesser extent, businesses accountable, I think that we're going to see a real surge in application of the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment in the context of the climate emergency. (Interview with IP05)

Such growing recognition serves as a catalyst for accountability, with experts predicting a surge in the legislative and legal application of the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment to hold States accountable in addressing the climate emergency (see Boyd, 2024; Boyd, De Bona and Rodriguez-Garavio, 2024). Together, these developments highlight the evolving prominence of this right in international climate frameworks and its potential to drive transformative action.

4.3.4.1 Normative overlaps:

¹³² Interview with IP02, IP05

¹³³ Interview with IP03

¹³⁴ Interview with IP05

Concepts like just transition, equity, and Indigenous Rights indirectly reinforced human rights norms by linking climate policies to labour rights, social safeguards, cultural heritage, and intergenerational equity. As one interviewee noted:

Human rights, included in the Paris Agreement preamble, is part of the discussions in the Paris rulebook and the Article 6 market mechanisms. It has emerged as a norm but is not widely implemented (Interview with IP07)

The integration of human rights with other critical norms and normative discourses such as just transition, indigenous rights, and equity is prominently articulated within the preamble of the Paris Agreement, which underscores the importance of respecting, promoting, and considering human rights, the right to health, and the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities. This foundational commitment continues to resonate in climate discussions, shaping the evolving normative landscape.¹³⁵ Furthermore, the interdependence of climate justice and human rights reinforces the notion that achieving climate justice inherently requires advancing social justice, creating an indivisible relationship between the two.¹³⁶ In operational contexts, the reference to existing human rights obligations often serves as a prelude to discussions on specific mechanisms, such as those governing carbon markets, highlighting the enduring role of human rights in shaping equitable climate governance frameworks.¹³⁷

For instance, regarding Article 6 of the Paris Agreement—which covers carbon market mechanisms—human rights norms remain contested among interview partners: some emphasise its inclusion, while others believe it is largely overlooked. I agree with one interviewee who described it as “piecemeal,”¹³⁸ meaning it was not implemented according to a clear plan but rather at different times and in different ways. In Article 6 discussions on carbon market mechanisms, human rights considerations emerged that focused on community impacts and environmental integrity. Advocates pushed for safeguards to ensure respect for human rights and community inclusion, but divisions among parties—some fearing new liabilities—kept these norms contested and operationally weak. Moreover, according to a negotiator, the scope and implementation of human rights in climate policy vary widely, reflecting differing political systems and perceptions around the world. Some countries firmly believe that human rights should be central to climate action, whereas others view it as an

¹³⁵ Interview with IP16

¹³⁶ Interview with IP16

¹³⁷ Interview with IP16

¹³⁸ Interview with IP16

imposition of Northern values. Although many Global South groups also champion these principles, the dialogue can be overshadowed by concerns about Northern dominance, resulting in multiple perspectives that shape how human rights discourse interacts with broader climate negotiations.¹³⁹

Yet again, this highlights how human right norms bolster normative discourses around equity. When the principle of equity within the Paris Agreement reflects both its persistence and evolution, marked by tensions between normative commitments and operational realities, the Agreement incorporates terms like human rights and climate justice—yet, the explicit principle of historical responsibility was notably absent, signalling a dilution of equity's foundational elements:

The developed countries, what they did, they polluted the atmosphere. That's their historical responsibility. Now, the emerging countries like China, they're polluting currently massively. That would be their tomorrow's historical responsibility. So historical responsibility is recognised in 1992 in the convention, UNFCCC [...] but if you look at the Paris Agreement, historical responsibilities are not there. (Interview with IP06)

Although the interviewee states that historical responsibilities *per se* are not emphasised in the Paris Agreement, evidence from the Preamble, Article 2(2), 4(3), 4(19) adequately suggests the incorporation of the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities (CBDR-RC). Political pressure to include current high GHG-emitting countries under the pretext of equity remains considerably important. While equity's linkage to CBDR-RC persists, its operational content has weakened, reducing its tangible impact on global climate governance.¹⁴⁰ Equity also underpins the Paris Agreement's alignment with sustainable development and poverty eradication, emphasising its role as a fundamental condition for achieving these broader goals.¹⁴¹ Furthermore, equity extends to energy access and human needs, where the equitable distribution of resources is framed as essential for ensuring basic human rights and a decent standard of living for the majority of the global population.¹⁴² Together, these perspectives highlight equity as both a guiding principle and a contested space within the Paris Agreement and its implementation. The normative meaning of equity is international as well as domestic. Here, the normative aspects of equity in the Paris Agreement include the ethical principles guiding how responsibilities should be distributed between

¹³⁹ Interview with IP16

¹⁴⁰ Interview with IP14

¹⁴¹ Interview with IP14

¹⁴² Interview with IP05

states—particularly regarding historical emissions, development needs, and capabilities; but also, within states—regarding inequality, social security, and progressive realisation of human rights. Human rights establish minimum acceptable thresholds for climate change impacts on people (Caney, 2005, 2006, 2014). By creating standards for states regarding individuals and defining norms within societies, they structure state-citizen relationships (Risse and Sikkink, 1999; Risse, 2004; Atapattu and Schapper, 2019) and highlight governmental responsibilities to protect citizens from environmental threats like pollution, floods, droughts, and water contamination (Ann Samuel, 2026a).

This dual interpretation of equity—both international and domestic—reveals the complex dynamics of how normative principles are operationalised in climate negotiations, as evidenced by ongoing debates about implementation. A negotiator explains that while many negotiators may be open to issues like a just transition and equity in climate action, success ultimately depends on achieving consensus—especially with the support of the COP presidency.¹⁴³ Civil society organisations, particularly those from the Global South, have strongly advocated for integrating justice and equity into the Paris Agreement’s implementation. This includes recognising social and economic impacts of the transition beyond mere “response measures” or economic diversification.¹⁴⁴ In recent negotiations, including COP27, there was a concerted push to elevate just transition, equity, and climate justice. While there was resistance from some developed countries, the issue advanced enough to become part of a work program heading into future COPs, including Dubai (COP28). However, the interviewee stresses that the real challenge lies in how these justice-oriented commitments will be put into practice.

Normative discourses around gender and/or women are related to equity too and thus, gender equity remains a separate yet aligned issue that is critical but under-addressed. There is a trend of decreasing prominence of women representation and participation in the UNFCCC COPs—highlighting the persistent gaps in awareness and participation, often influenced by cultural and systemic barriers.¹⁴⁵ While gender has been formally recognised as part of the UNFCCC agenda through dedicated work programs, Lima Work Programme on Gender and its Gender Action Plan (GAP) through Decision 3/CP.25, its integration into broader discussions of human rights and equity remains uneven.¹⁴⁶ Furthermore, the role of women in environmental

¹⁴³ Interview with IP14

¹⁴⁴ Interview with IP14

¹⁴⁵ Interview with IP01

¹⁴⁶ Interview with IP09

leadership has drawn attention. Countries led by women, such as Estonia, Slovenia, and Iceland, tend to have stronger environmental performances.¹⁴⁷ This underscores the potential of gender equality to enhance both the effectiveness and fairness of climate policies, advocating for greater inclusion of women in leadership and negotiation spaces (Gay-Antaki, 2017; Barraza Vargas, 2019; Westman, 2024).

One core reason for the slow and fragmented advancement of human rights norms is the deep geopolitical divide and varied conceptions of human rights. Resistance to robust human rights language often stems from cultural perspectives. Some states view human rights as a Western construct or a threat to sovereignty, leading to subtle diplomatic "horse trading" that diluted such language. As another participant observed:

We lose human rights language not in open negotiation but in the horse trading. Some governments don't want human rights outcomes [...] Many governments that don't want human rights outcomes won't say it and will be part of that background dealing to get it out. (Interview with IP03)

Also, "different parties sign on to different human rights agreements [...] most countries have different understandings of what human rights is. It is a complicated area."¹⁴⁸ Thus the complexities around human rights go beyond a climate imperative, highlighting different understandings in each interpretation, often challenging the universality of human rights (Tharoor, 1999). For instance, human rights become understood as more of individual rights, when the African comprehension of rights are more collective as opposed to individualistic (Tharoor, 1999). However, human rights as we know now (arguably stemming from Western origins) undergo contestation in meaning, when it reaches domestic/local levels, owing to cultural economic, social and political sympathies (Prantl and Nakano, 2018; Mihr, 2022). This is substantiated by Niemann and Schillinger who observes the instability of norm meaning through contestation, which they picture as "politics of reality" (Niemann and Schillinger, 2017, p. 29).

Despite this, developments like the recognition of the Right to a Clean Healthy and Sustainable Environment by the Human Rights Council and UN General Assembly have increased pressure on negotiators.¹⁴⁹ It is coupled with vast climate/social movements (Vanhala, 2022). Furthermore, the normative overlap which Right to a Clean Healthy and Sustainable

¹⁴⁷ Interview with IP05

¹⁴⁸ Interview with IP18

¹⁴⁹ Interview with IP03, IP05, IP07, IP12; Further discussed in *Chapter 5: Influence of Global Norms on Negotiations and Agreements*

Environment initiates is multiple; an example is when Kotze observes who the “hidden subjects” of this new right are (2023, p. 194)—specifying: future generations (thus underscoring intergenerational equity norms) and nature (thus, Global Earth Stewardship Norms). As climate impacts intensify, there is an increase in the moral and legal imperative to protect human rights across the globe (Kotzé and Knappe, 2023; Mayer and van Asselt, 2023). Cases such as *Urgenda* in the Netherlands and requests for Advisory Opinions from bodies like the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACtHR) and International Court of Justice (ICJ) demonstrate how climate obligations are increasingly interpreted through a rights-based lens (Ann Samuel, 2024c; Ann Samuel and Nestor, 2024; Tigre, 2024a; Ann Samuel, 2026a). These external shifts influence the broader political context, gradually nudging negotiators toward stronger recognition of human rights, even if implementation remains inconsistent.

4.3.5 Loss and Damage norms

The current working definition of loss and damage in the UNFCCC is “the actual and/or potential manifestation of impacts associated with climate change in developing countries that negatively affect human and natural systems” (UNFCCC, 2012, p. 3)¹⁵⁰ While mitigation addresses the causes of climate change (like reducing greenhouse gas emissions) and adaptation addresses its impacts (like building sea walls to prevent flooding), loss and damage is concerned with the unavoidable and irreversible impacts of the climate crisis. (UNEP, 2023a). Heilinger and Kempt (2024) distinguish the two related concepts with respect to understanding Loss and Damage. First, “losses and damages”—lowercase, plural—refers to the harms caused by human-induced climate change. These include physical impacts (e.g., infrastructure damage, displacement from floods), economic impacts (e.g., reduced agricultural yields, loss of tourism revenue), and non-economic impacts (e.g., loss of cultural heritage and ecosystem services). In other words, this captures the wide range of harms climate change inflicts. Second, “Loss and Damage”—often in capitalised singular form—refers to policy responses, especially financial support for those most affected, generally less affluent and less polluting countries, so they can recover, rebuild, adapt, and strengthen resilience. These payments usually originate from historically high-emitting, affluent countries, though other funding sources are not ruled out. Loss and Damage focus on these payments provided primarily by wealthier, historically polluting nations.

¹⁵⁰ See also, how the thesis defines Loss and Damage Norms in *Chapter 3: Methodology – Section 3.1 Research Design*

The recognition and operationalisation of Loss and Damage within climate governance have been a protracted journey of incremental progress and resistance. Early milestones, such as the establishment of the Warsaw International Mechanism (WIM) at COP19 in 2013 provided an institutional framework for addressing Loss and Damage but left significant gaps in actionable commitments.¹⁵¹ Earlier COPs, including COP18 at Doha in 2012 reflected the cyclical nature of Loss and Damage discussions: “a long fight that came with two steps forward, one step backward.”¹⁵² The Paris Agreement advanced Loss and Damage norms with the inclusion of Article 8: a dedicated provision recognising Loss and Damage in a core climate treaty for the first time. However, its accompanying decision text, Paragraph 51 of 1/CP.21, explicitly ruled out liability or compensation, symbolising both progress and Loss and Damage inherent limitations:

Some people were very excited, "Oh, we got a standalone article," because we always tried to go beyond adaptation. But if you look closely at that accompanying decision, 1/CP.21 that established the Paris Agreement, Paragraph 51, that says that Article 8 does not provide any basis for liability and compensation. (Interview with IP06)

Post-Paris developments expanded the institutional framework, with the WIM Executive Committee and the Santiago Network providing technical and policy mechanisms to support vulnerable countries.¹⁵³ A significant breakthrough came at COP27 in Sharm El-Sheikh in 2022 when the Loss and Damage Fund was finally established after decades of advocacy by vulnerable states and civil society. This decision marked a critical normative shift from mere recognition to the creation of financial mechanisms, despite ongoing challenges in securing adequate funding.¹⁵⁴ The traction in COP27 for Loss and Damage fund was for three reasons according to an interviewee:

The perfect storm happened in Sharm El-Sheikh for three reasons. The first one was that back in Pakistan, the floods in Pakistan [...] presented [...] huge effect and losses and damages for one country. This put it very strongly on the agenda. The second one, unity between all developing countries, who demanded and requested this outcome, most of them. That goes beyond just a mere dialogue for a discussion or a process. [...] This was complemented, so the third element of it was the very strong push from civil society. (Interview with IP14)

¹⁵¹ Interview with IP06

¹⁵² Interview with IP02

¹⁵³ Interview with IP06

¹⁵⁴ Interview with IP06

At COP28, discussions progressed to operationalising the Loss and Damage Fund, with commitments to make financing available from the outset of the conference: a significant step toward addressing urgency in Loss and Damage implementation.¹⁵⁵ This evolving trajectory—from initial resistance to gradual recognition and eventual internalisation—demonstrates the growing normative acceptance of Loss and Damage as an essential component of global climate governance, driven by persistent advocacy and the escalating impacts of climate change on vulnerable communities. However, criticisms around the heightened publicity in contrast to its efficacy was highlighted in an interview:

UAE spent vastly more money organising COP than they contributed to the Loss and Damage Fund, which was one of the crowning achievements of their presidency. The amount of money going into that fund is minuscule compared to the scope of loss and damage. (Interview with IP03)

The UAE spent an estimated USD 7 billion on the COP28 venue, while pledging only USD 100 million to the Loss and Damage Fund (Maslin, Parikh and Chin-Yee, 2023; Richards and Jowahir, 2023). Overall pledges during COP28 reached USD 700 million—far short of the USD 400 billion developing countries need annually to address loss and damage (Lakhani, 2023a).

4.3.5.1 Normative overlaps:

Loss and Damage norms are deeply intertwined with normative discourses around climate justice, equity, and human rights, reflecting the broader normative themes within global climate governance. Framing Loss and Damage as an issue of fairness and historical responsibility, vulnerable countries have long argued that those least responsible for climate change should not disproportionately bear its costs, aligning Loss and Damage with North-South equity debates and the overarching discourse on climate justice.¹⁵⁶

While loss and damage have been part of the UNFCCC process since its inception—introduced by the Association of Small Island States 30 years ago—it is only in recent years that we've begun to operationalise a response. This shift has been driven by the climate justice movement, which has emphasised the need for funding for loss and damage. Although the fund we've established is still significantly under-resourced, we've made progress that once seemed impossible. The link between climate justice and social justice is becoming clearer, and it is evident that you can't have climate justice without social justice. (Interview with IP16)

¹⁵⁵ Interview with IP01

¹⁵⁶ Interview with IP06

Loss and Damage also connect to human rights norms, particularly the right to a healthy environment, and intergenerational equity, addressing non-economic losses such as culture, heritage, and health, and emphasising the rights of Indigenous Peoples, children, and youth.¹⁵⁷ To date, less than 2.4 per cent of climate finance has gone towards projects incorporating activities integrating children's needs.¹⁵⁸ UNICEF records how Loss and Damage had to be prioritised in the New Common Quantified Goal for Climate Finance (NCQG)—along with a robust incorporation of youth and children in the same (Ann Samuel, 2024a; Colón and Szaboova, 2024). Moreover, an interviewee equated Loss and Damage with the issue of 'access to justice' commenting it from a standpoint of human rights and climate justice:

Loss and damage are an issue of access to justice and effective remedy. It is an obligation. Essentially, what this fund looks like right now is just another inadequately funded mechanism that probably won't be well administered from a human rights standpoint because it is administered by the bank. It is also likely not to be very easily accessible to people actually affected by climate change, as that's not a strong suit of the bank. It looks like just another fund that would be tough to distinguish from a humanitarian relief fund. [...] In the case of the Loss and Damage Fund, it is quite likely that the funds will go through governments, and who knows where they'll actually end up. It is likely they'll be primarily related to responding to crisis situations rather than the slow onset effects of climate change like famines and displacement. (Interview with IP03)

Yet the divergence in the negotiations is vividly brought out when the interviewee stressed how, from a human rights perspective, current COP outcomes on loss and damage fall short of State obligations. The UAE did spend more on hosting the conference than it contributed to the Loss and Damage Fund, which remains under-resourced and lacks explicit human rights safeguards.¹⁵⁹

The recommendations of the transitional committee [on Loss and Damage] up until the last meeting included human rights within the governance framework for the fund, but that was pulled. There is a reference in the preambular decision text to human rights, but there is no operative or substantial human rights focus. (Interview with IP03)

The interviewee also highlighted that, since the fund is administered by a bank and likely channelled through governments, it may not offer direct remedies to those facing slow onset impacts such as famine or displacement.¹⁶⁰ Advocates propose a transitional justice lens

¹⁵⁷ Interview with IP03, IP15

¹⁵⁸ Interview with IP15

¹⁵⁹ Interview with IP03

¹⁶⁰ Interview with IP03

(inspired by the Marshall Islands' response to nuclear testing) to address accountability, reparations, and protections against future harm.¹⁶¹

It is noted how Loss and Damage complements mitigation, adaptation, and sustainable development by advocating for holistic approaches that extend beyond financial mechanisms to include technical support, ecosystem restoration, and resettlement, ensuring vulnerable communities are not left behind.¹⁶²

4.3.6 Global Earth Stewardship norms

The progression of climate negotiations under the UNFCCC reflects a significant shift from a narrow focus on emissions reductions and adaptation to a broader nexus of climate with ecosystems and nature—broadly understood as norms of global earth stewardship (Falkner and Buzan, 2019; Falkner, 2020). They are comprehended as norms that help in “proactive shaping of physical, biological, and social conditions to sustain, rather than disrupt, critical earth-system processes in support of nature and human wellbeing at local-to-planetary scales.” (Chapin *et al.*, 2010, 2022; Steffen *et al.*, 2011). Therefore, though it can be interchangeably used: planetary stewardship (Steffen *et al.*, 2011), earth stewardship (Chapin *et al.*, 2022), ecosystem stewardship (Chapin *et al.*, 2010), environmental stewardship (Falkner and Buzan, 2019), I acknowledge here the common denominator of these terms as a preferred comprehension of global earth stewardship norms: that is, any normative arguments around the intersection of environment, nature and sustainability, which inclines to climate action and justice.

Early COPs primarily emphasised greenhouse gas mitigation, with little explicit attention to biodiversity or the ecosystem. However, literature notes the emergence of environmental stewardship from 19th century where initiatives by a select group of environmentalists, scientists, and politicians began to address the cross-border aspects of nature conservation (Boardman, 1981, pp. 26–30; Tyrrell, 2015; Falkner and Buzan, 2019). With Paris Agreement, a growing recognition emerged that climate stability is inseparable from the health of ecosystems, prompting discussions on sustainable land use, ocean protection, and biodiversity conservation. This shift gained momentum at COP27 where "nature-based solutions" and

¹⁶¹ Interview with IP03

¹⁶² Interview with IP06

biodiversity were explicitly incorporated into cover decisions, signifying the integration of holistic environmental stewardship into the climate regime:

The one concept that I maybe worked most on from a not civil-society, but observer perspective, is the reference to nature-based solutions and the link to biodiversity in the recent cover decision from Sharm El Sheikh [but] also [from] Glasgow. There was the first mentioning in Sharm El Sheikh especially 'nature-based solutions' and then Dubai had a reference or several references to biodiversity, and on that I worked with the IUCN and there I could, you know, I could tell a lot about how they came to the COP. IUCN said we want a reference to nature-based solutions in one of the decisions. And they came to me and said [...] how do we do that? And they had no clue. They just said, oh, shall we just stand here and say it? It is like, no, you have to formulate a text. You have to have a text proposal that States can see how you, you know, want to have it referenced, and then you have to find allies, right? You have to find States that actually may be willing to embrace it and work with them, and then they have to put it out in the plenary. And so, we built this whole strategy together. (Interview with IP04)

Parallel global initiatives, such as the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, which is a product of COP15 of UN Convention of Biodiversity (UNCBD), further influenced these norms, underscoring the interconnectedness of climate and biodiversity conventions. For instance, the integration of the right to a healthy environment within the biodiversity framework exemplifies the cross-pollination of stewardship principles across regimes.

The right to a healthy environment was integrated into the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and the CBD COP 15 outcome. It was integrated into the Global Chemicals Framework adopted last year. We've been pushing in all those places. There is an ongoing discussion now under the Council of Europe about a potential mechanism for the right to a healthy environment. There is also an ongoing discussion in ASEAN. About a new environmental rights framework, a number of countries, Canada being one, have domestically recognised the right to a healthy environment since the resolutions. And I think there is a lot more litigation. UNEP and New York University (NYU) and the Special Rapporteur on Environment just launched a website, pulling together some of that litigation. (Interview with IP03)

This also shows how norms diffuse further when complementary actions and outcomes from other platforms like UNCBD or UNCCD reinforce the internalisation of these norms in UNFCCC COPs.

Vulnerable nations like Bangladesh have also been instrumental in broadening the climate agenda, highlighting the direct link between climate impacts—such as sea-level rise and loss of arable land—and the need for ecosystem resilience and sustainable resource management.¹⁶³ Moreover, indigenous knowledge and the concept of "rights of nature" have emerged as critical

¹⁶³ Interview with IP01

components of this evolving stewardship paradigm. Practices such as Australian Aboriginal fire management illustrate the value of traditional ecological knowledge, while the recognition of nature's intrinsic worth adds ethical and cultural dimensions to climate governance.¹⁶⁴ Together, these developments represent the maturation of global earth stewardship norms, shifting from a climate-centric focus to a more integrated and holistic framework.

Climate negotiations evolved from narrowly focusing on emissions reductions to explicitly acknowledging the inseparable link between climate action, biodiversity, and nature-based solutions. Early COPs were silent on ecosystem health, treating greenhouse gas mitigation as an isolated goal, but by the Paris era and especially from COP26 onward, cover decisions increasingly referenced biodiversity, ecosystem integrity, and nature-based approaches. At COP27, these references expanded, embedding climate action within a broader planetary stewardship framework. This shift emerged from converging scientific evidence (e.g., IPBES, IPCC special reports), the influence of external treaties like the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, and persistent advocacy by observer organisations such as IUCN, all of which helped mainstream ecosystem-based thinking into the heart of global climate governance.

4.3.6.1 Normative overlaps:

Environmental stewardship has emerged as a crucial intersection of norms and normative discourses around—climate justice, equity, human rights, just transition, and biodiversity governance, reflecting its multifaceted role within the global climate regime. Vulnerable states and civil society have consistently framed Global Earth Stewardship norms to constitute the narrative of an issue of equity and justice, emphasising that communities most affected by climate change—such as those in Bangladesh, facing rising sea levels and loss of arable land—depend heavily on intact ecosystems for survival.¹⁶⁵ This makes Global Earth Stewardship norms essential not only for environmental protection but also for ensuring equitable outcomes for those least responsible for climate impacts.

Global Earth Stewardship norms are deeply intertwined with human rights, particularly the right to food, water, and a healthy environment.¹⁶⁶ As environmental degradation threatens these basic rights, safeguarding ecosystems becomes integral to fulfilling human rights

¹⁶⁴ Interview with IP01, IP02

¹⁶⁵ Interview with IP01

¹⁶⁶ Interview with IP03

obligations, a connection increasingly reflected in global climate and biodiversity frameworks. For instance, the growing recognition of the right to a healthy environment ties environmental stewardship to the protection of essential human needs. The concept of a 'just transition' further aligns with Global Environmental Stewardship norms, extending beyond economic shifts away from fossil fuels to include ecosystem restoration and biodiversity preservation. This evolving norm emphasises fairness not only for workers and communities but also for ecosystems and future generations, highlighting the necessity of balancing climate action with ecological care.¹⁶⁷

Additionally, Global Earth Stewardship norms draw strength from integration with other environmental treaties, such as the UNCBD and the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Cross-referencing biodiversity and ocean management frameworks enhances the role of stewardship in climate negotiations, reinforcing the need for nature-positive, ecosystem-based solutions. The parallel proceedings which happened in the international courts and tribunals testify to the same:

The International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea hearing was focused on the protection of the marine environment, and of course, oceans are the biggest carbon sinks. They absorb some 93 per cent of excess heat. The International Court of Justice advisory opinion, which is progressing in parallel, will involve a broader range of issues beyond protection of the marine environment, including human rights principles. Of course, human rights are generally owed by states to their own citizens, so the principle of transboundary harm is probably more significant because it implicates the obligations of the major polluters towards climate vulnerable states. (Interview with IP17)

The integration of "nature-based solutions" and references to biodiversity in COP27 cover decisions, alongside acknowledgments of intangible cultural heritage, reflects an evolving understanding of Global Earth Stewardship norms as both a technical and cultural imperative in and beyond UNFCCC COP negotiations.¹⁶⁸ Further, highlighting the need for inclusion of more perspectives from actors like the Indigenous People and youth/children—to stress equity and justice—in intersecting themes of climate and environmental stewardship.

Yes, I think there definitely is a need for activists to be involved in these spaces more. You have to always bring awareness to issues. In terms of text, we have to include in every thematic area the language to include indigenous people and intergenerational justice and equity in the ocean and climate dialogue. [...] I want to see more of that as well because that's a newer dialogue that just started a few years ago. But I think we're

¹⁶⁷ Interview with IP04

¹⁶⁸ Interview with IP04

still at the stage where equity is not yet on the table. That's all I can say. (Interview with IP08)

The interviewer observes that advocacy often employs normative frames to create linkages and form dynamic norm clusters. In this context, the role of environmental stewardship in advancing equity, justice, and holistic climate solutions becomes evident when social and climate movements foreground diverse issues—from Indigenous land rights and deep-sea mining to anti-fossil-fuel and climate justice norms¹⁶⁹—thereby enabling Global Earth Stewardship norms to intersect with and reinforce multiple advocacy pathways.

4.3.7 Ecocide norms

Ecocide norms, while not yet central to formal UNFCCC negotiations, have gained traction over time through discussions at side events, parallel forums, and related environmental assemblies such as biodiversity COPs. Ecocide means unlawful or wanton acts committed with knowledge that there is a substantial likelihood of severe and either widespread or long-term damage to the environment being caused by those acts.’(Stop Ecocide International, 2021) There is no mention of ecocide in the COP texts, to date; and there is no traction for the same in the actual negotiations space. This can be best understood through the simplistic answer to my question to one of the negotiators, if there were any traces of ecocide reference in the negotiations: “No. No.”¹⁷⁰

While the interviews did not identify a specific COP where ecocide was a formal agenda item, some interviewees emphasised its peripheral presence in spaces around official negotiations, with advocates leveraging these venues to introduce the concept into broader climate-environment discourse.¹⁷¹ This is stressed by an interviewee:

I mean it hasn't been appearing I think so much in the negotiations at UNFCCC but more around like, you know, at the different spaces around the negotiations. (Interview with IP08)

Albeit it is recognised that civil society is talking about it,¹⁷² the norm largely is framed as a symbolic and moral argument by activists and legal scholars, ecocide highlights the severity of environmental destruction as a rallying cry developed as a legal instrument. An interviewee who is a critical pioneer of the Ecocide movement emphasised:

¹⁶⁹ Interview with IP08

¹⁷⁰ Interview with IP18

¹⁷¹ Interview with IP09, IP12

¹⁷² Interview with IP20

[I]t's more than just symbolic. It is actually practical. That moral aspect of saying, you know, the worst harms are crimes is a sort of symbolic way, but it has quite a strong kind of practical echo to what's going on. (Interview with IP12)

Over time, however, growing advocacy and legal scholarship have transitioned ecocide into a concept of incremental legal recognition (Chadel, Bhanot and Verma, 2023; White, 2023). National initiatives in countries like Belgium and France, discussions within the EU's Environmental Crimes Directive, and deliberations at the International Criminal Court (ICC) have shifted the debate from whether ecocide should be addressed to how and when it can be implemented as an international crime.¹⁷³ Proponents argue that ecocide laws can strengthen existing environmental frameworks by providing a legal "container" to enforce accountability and elevate the seriousness of environmental protection measures.¹⁷⁴ This trajectory underscores the evolution of ecocide—positioning itself as a critical normative tool within the broader landscape of international environmental law and governance.

That said, it is important to nuance the approach of ecocide norms advanced by activists and lawyers, which is best described by an interviewee who stresses the motive of the activism for ecocide norms around the space of negotiations:

But that's the feeling of the shift in the conversation. [...] I suppose what we're also coming back to here is that our primary aim has never been to get into the climate negotiations. Our primary aim has always been to have ecocide criminalised and the climate negotiations can't do that. (Interview with IP12)

Yet, to one side of the political space, in the legal space the contestation for the diffusion of ecocide norms is high.

Ecocide is a useful slogan, but if you look at it from the point of view of legal content, I'm not sure how relevant it is to climate change as opposed to other forms of pollution. There is already a war crime of extensive destruction of the environment under the Geneva Convention, which is arguably ecocide. One could extend that to peacetime through a new crime of ecocide, but I would say that ecocide is useful more as a slogan rather than a meaningful legal construct that would relate to climate change. Climate change, unlike other forms of pollution, does not have the same immediate cause and effect as, let's say, an oil spill or burning down a forest or whatever the case may be. There is a significant gap in time between the harmful activity and the consequences being felt. (Interview with IP17)

The interviewee explained further how establishing causation within criminal law is often straightforward: for example, if a person fatally stabs another, the direct perpetrator and the

¹⁷³ Interview with IP02, IP12

¹⁷⁴ Interview with IP12

cause of death are easily identified. By contrast, applying this logic to climate change is considerably more challenging due to its systemic nature and the dispersed responsibilities involved. The interviewee likened the difficulty in attributing blame for climate-related harm to more conventional acts of environmental destruction—such as large-scale oil spills or the deliberate demolition of infrastructure during wartime that leads to environmental catastrophe—where the link between action and outcome is clearer. In the case of climate change, it is not evident whether to hold accountable the executives of major energy corporations, the heads of state overseeing carbon-intensive economies, or other actors embedded in a global system of production and consumption. For this reason, the interviewee argued that calling climate change a crime may be more a slogan than a solution. Instead, the concept of ecocide may offer a more viable legal tool, particularly for environmental harm where causation is more immediate and clearly traceable.¹⁷⁵

4.3.7.1 Normative overlaps:

Ecocide norms, though emerging as a distinct concept, align closely with established frameworks like human rights, climate justice, biodiversity protection. By framing ecocide as a violation of the right to a healthy environment and intergenerational equity, proponents connect it to recognised human rights principles, enhancing its moral and legal resonance. This alignment extends to Global Earth Stewardship norms, with advocates emphasising the role of ecocide laws in protecting ecosystems, often through discussions at biodiversity COPs and parallel forums¹⁷⁶ An interviewee stressed how the Stop Ecocide campaign is all about aligning ecocide norms to human rights norms:

[It is all about] Human right. Human rights, definitely [...] I'm going to confess that we almost never talk about fossil fuels. There are other people who are doing that very well already, like the fossil fuel non-proliferation [advocacy groups], for example. I mean, we don't, we don't, we don't actively avoid it, but we don't focus on it. (Interview with IP12)

Yet, ecocide supports anti-fossil fuel norms by proposing criminal accountability for actions that knowingly exacerbate climate change, such as destroying carbon sinks or opening new fossil fuel projects.¹⁷⁷ Ecocide also complements existing legal frameworks by filling gaps in environmental and criminal law, providing a universal "outer boundary" that condemns severe

¹⁷⁵ Interview with IP17

¹⁷⁶ Interview with IP12

¹⁷⁷ Interview with IP12

ecological harm. This approach positions ecocide laws as tools to strengthen and enforce other environmental treaties and norms.¹⁷⁸

4.3.8 Sufficiency

Sufficiency has gradually permeated the broader UNFCCC negotiation process over time, as a principled idea.¹⁷⁹ According to the IPCC, “sufficiency” is understood as a set of measures and daily practices that avoid demand for energy, materials, land, and water while delivering human wellbeing for all within planetary boundaries (Shukla *et al.*, 2022, p. 31); thus sufficiency addresses the “causes of the environmental impacts of human activities by avoiding the demand for energy and materials” (Shukla *et al.*, 2022, p. 957). According to Darby, sufficiency offers a normative framework to analyse what it means to have enough (2007). As opposed to efficiency, which seeks to produce more with fewer inputs without necessarily considering ecological limits, sufficiency emphasises reducing total consumption to remain within the planet’s biophysical boundaries (Princen, 2003; Rees, 2021; Saheb, 2021). Sufficiency concerns how equitably space and resources are utilised. Its upper boundary is defined by the remaining carbon budget and the principle of fair distribution, while the lower boundary is established by the conditions necessary to maintain a decent standard of living (Cabeza *et al.*, 2022). It is worthwhile to note, how the semantics around the ‘sufficiency’ also in relation to ecosystem limits and the preference for less—“concepts like voluntary simplicity, strong sustainability, and planetary boundaries also relate to sufficiency” (Jungell-Michelsson and Heikkurinen, 2022, p. 8; Lehtonen and Heikkurinen, 2022). This broadens the scope of how sufficiency is referenced at UNFCCC COPs.

Post the Paris Agreement, the concept is observed to gain traction, especially coupling with the discussion about indigenous engagement, climate justice and human rights. There is a growing awareness of sufficiency’s relevance in achieving equitable and sustainable climate action.¹⁸⁰ Initially, sufficiency-related ideas were peripheral and overshadowed by the dominant focus on systemic emissions reductions. Early scepticism framed the principle as less actionable, with behavioural shifts for economy seen as less impactful compared to structural transformations¹⁸¹ Over time, however, the discourse began to acknowledge the inequalities in consumption patterns, particularly the outsized emissions of wealthier demographics. For instance,

¹⁷⁸ Interview with IP12

¹⁷⁹ See *Chapter 1: Introduction* to read about norms and principled ideas.

¹⁸⁰ Interview with IP01

¹⁸¹ Interview with IP05

recognising that the richest 1 per cent produce emissions equivalent to the poorest 66% reframed sufficiency as a necessary principle for addressing global fairness and sustainability.¹⁸² This gradual evolution highlights how sufficiency has shifted from abstract notions to a foundational lens for examining consumption and equity within the climate regime.

4.3.8.1 Normative overlaps:

Sufficiency norms align closely with normative discourses around human rights, equity, climate justice, and global environmental stewardship, reinforcing their relevance within the climate discourse.¹⁸³ Rooted in the right to a decent standard of living, sufficiency emphasises fair resource distribution, ensuring that marginalised populations consume enough to meet their basic needs while addressing luxury emissions from wealthier demographics.¹⁸⁴ This framing integrates sufficiency with equity and justice, targeting overconsumption by the affluent while safeguarding fundamental rights for all. Indigenous knowledge systems further exemplify sufficiency through ecological stewardship, aligning indigenous rights with sustainable resource use and positioning these communities as models for living within ecological limits. According an interviewee, explicit references to planetary boundaries have surfaced more prominently in recent years, notably over the last two years.¹⁸⁵

While the term itself was not included in the language of the Paris Agreement, the approach taken at that time already reflected a broader, more integrated perspective to address development priorities. This shift aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and acknowledged issues such as the right to develop and the equitable allocation of resources—questions fundamentally tied to distributive justice and the sharing of ecological space. Since Paris, these concerns have gained increasing traction, and efforts to incorporate planetary boundaries into policy frameworks have intensified.¹⁸⁶

Sufficiency also intersects with climate justice and loss and damage by emphasising fairness in addressing historical emissions. It underscores the responsibility of high-emitting countries to scale back consumption while supporting vulnerable communities in achieving sufficiency. Although not always explicit in loss and damage frameworks, sufficiency's principles resonate with their justice-oriented logic. Darby conceptualises sufficiency as a framework for

¹⁸² Interview with IP05

¹⁸³ Interview with IP13

¹⁸⁴ Interview with IP05

¹⁸⁵ Interview with IP09

¹⁸⁶ Interview with IP09

determining 'what is enough', echoing the reparative ambitions of loss and damage policies that aim to redress disproportionate impacts on vulnerable communities (2007). In this way, sufficiency's dual focus on ecological limits and fair distribution reinforces the broader justice-oriented rationale of loss and damage frameworks (Cabeza *et al.*, 2022; Rao, 2022).

Over time, sufficiency has matured to a nuanced principle grounded in equity, human rights, indigenous knowledge, and planetary sustainability. However, its integration into formal negotiation texts remains limited, relying on political will, normative alignment with frameworks such as the SDGs, and advocacy from civil society. As sufficiency gains traction across these interrelated domains, it underscores the imperative of balancing consumption patterns and economic systems with global equity and ecological resilience.

Conclusion:

This chapter demonstrates that global norms within the UNFCCC negotiations operate through a complex ecosystem of strategic appropriation, incremental institutionalisation, and persistent contestation. The chapter exposes how climate movements and transnational advocacy networks have successfully transformed the moral architecture of climate governance by creating overlapping normative frameworks that mutually reinforce one another. However, the chapter simultaneously reveals the limits of normative influence within a system governed by consensus politics and structural power imbalances. The strategic reappropriation of terminology—particularly evident in developing countries' redefinition of "just transition" to operationalise CBDR principles—illustrates how state actors actively reshape normative meanings to advance national interests which arguably might not comply with the external moral imperatives. The persistent gap between symbolic recognition and substantive implementation, exemplified by youth participation critique and the under-resourced Loss and Damage Fund, underscores how normative progress often serves legitimacy functions without generating corresponding political transformation.

The analysis ultimately demonstrates that UNFCCC negotiations function as a contested normative arena where moral frameworks (which in itself is contested as to what is moral and what is not; i.e., for instance, whether a domestic policy alignment to eradicate poverty more moral than the need for climate action; there are trade-offs for any policy choice, despite its best motives). These normative discourses, therefore, are seen to gradually reshape the discursive parameters of climate governance while remaining constrained by geopolitical realities, cultural contestation, and institutional structures that privilege procedural obstruction

over ambitious action. This dual dynamic—simultaneous normative expansion and political constraint—defines the contemporary landscape of international climate diplomacy.

Further, with the section that brought forth the eight identified norms, the analysis reveals several distinct patterns or trends in how various norms are referenced, contested, and evolve within UNFCCC negotiations. I explore six specific trends.

First, progressive integration of explicit normative language is observed. There is a clear progression from implicit to explicit references of norms in official texts. Early negotiations avoided direct mentions of terms like "fossil fuels" (to note anti-fossil fuel norms), "human rights," or "climate justice," but recent COPs show increasing willingness to name these concepts directly. As one negotiator noted regarding fossil fuels: "I think we should all be shocked and mortified that it took 30 years"¹⁸⁷ to explicitly mention them in COP decisions.

Second, strategic reappropriation of terminology is noted. Terms undergo semantic evolution as different actors redefine them to align with their interests. For example, "just transition" was initially peripheral in the Paris Agreement but has been redefined by developing nations to operationalise CBDR principles. As one negotiator observed:

In Paris, they [India and China] didn't say anything; they couldn't care less... But now it is more of a concept for the world in general... which means that developed countries have to go first (Interview with IP04).

The third trend observes how norm clustering and mutual reinforcement of normative themes bring dynamic and nuanced meaning of advocacy—norms and norm diffusion are three dimensional (Lantis and Wunderlich, 2022), and networks (i.e., often climate movements and TANs), I observe, shift spatial and temporal dimensions dictating influences. Thus, norms rarely operate in isolation but intersect and strengthen each other. Climate justice overlaps with human rights, intergenerational equity, and loss and damage; anti-fossil fuel norms align with environmental stewardship. This clustering creates stronger normative frameworks where multiple norms intersect and interconnect when viewed through different perspectives.¹⁸⁸

The fourth trend takes note of geopolitical dynamics and norm contestation because of it. Normative language faces resistance along geopolitical and cultural divides. Human rights particularly encounter pushback from states viewing it as Western-imposed: "We lose human

¹⁸⁷ Interview with IP03

¹⁸⁸ Interview with IP13

rights language not in open negotiation but in the horse trading. Some governments don't want human rights outcomes."¹⁸⁹

Fifth, by comprehending performative versus substantive diffusion of norms become important, it is noted that there is often a gap between symbolic mentions and actionable commitments. Youth participation in climate negotiations highlights this tension: "It is like, you know, they're just; there are basically some countries that sort of have them [youth] because they're paying lip service."¹⁹⁰

Finally, the sixth trend to be noted is how climate movements across different socio-political and legal avenues (i.e., beyond the international climate negotiations) become mutually reinforcing. Progress in parallel legal and policy forums influences UNFCCC negotiations cannot be overlooked. For instance, the recognition of the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment by the UN General Assembly has increased pressure on negotiators to incorporate human rights language.¹⁹¹

These trends demonstrate that climate negotiations function as a dynamic normative arena where principles are contested, reinterpreted, and gradually institutionalised, reflecting broader shifts in global climate governance and morality.

¹⁸⁹ Interview with IP03

¹⁹⁰ Interview with IP01

¹⁹¹ See *Chapter 7 Section 7.2.4* to read more on this.

Chapter 5: Influence of Global Norms on Negotiations and Agreements

Chapter 5 addresses the thesis's second research question: *How do these referenced global norms influence negotiations and agreements?* The chapter progresses from analysing the identified global norm references in climate negotiations (Chapter 4) to studying their substantive influence on negotiation processes and outcomes (Chapter 5).

Within the context of UNFCCC Conference of the Parties (COP) negotiations, references to global norms have evolved significantly over time, reflecting shifts in political will, scientific consensus, and strategic advocacy by various stakeholders, including states, civil society, and transnational movements.¹⁹² This chapter explores how multiple norms, discussed in the previous chapter and referenced across COP24 to COP28, interact and jointly influence climate politics. It also examines the strategies that norm entrepreneurs employ to ensure that the global norms they promote effectively influence negotiations and agreements.

The chapter is structured in two: Firstly, the chapter provides an analysis of normative shifts in international climate negotiations, examining theoretical dimensions of norm change and their relevance to understanding global norm influence within UNFCCC processes [*Section 5.1*].¹⁹³ Secondly, it offers a critical examination on how climate movements strengthen the influence of global norms, focusing specifically on framing strategies, coalition building, lobbying activities, and engagement by norm entrepreneurs [*Section 5.2*].

5. 1 Normative Shifts

Normative shift is the social process of changing domestic or international rules about what is deemed acceptable or unacceptable behaviour (Bell, 2002). Neither norm nor normative shift happens in isolation to another; this section, therefore, aligns to what Wiener observes as 'norm(ative)' (Wiener, 2023, p. 25). This highlights the dynamic and mutually constitutive relationships among norms, where the transformation of one norm can simultaneously influence, reinforce, or destabilise others within the normative landscape. Here, norms (as social facts) and normativity (as a matter of meaning, contestation, and interpretation) are

¹⁹² See *Chapter 7: COP Negotiation Processes, The Cover Decisions, and Normative Gains*

¹⁹³ To explore the theory used in the thesis, see *Chapter 2*, where the theory on norm change and how it is engaged in the thesis is noted.

particularly relevant to climate negotiations, where evolving interpretations of norms shape negotiation outcomes. Climate movements often trigger norm change in climate negotiations by challenging the status quo and introducing new normative ideas that can become established norms (see Khagram, Riker and Sikkink, 2002; Nardini *et al.*, 2021; Nisbett and Spaiser, 2023). Most individuals or states adopt a new global norm when they believe enough others will do so too—both to align with emerging expectations and to gain social or political benefits. As more actors embrace the norm, the perceived advantages of compliance grow, reinforcing its legitimacy and reducing resistance. Once adoption reaches a critical threshold, social incentives reverse in favour of conformity, triggering a rapid cascade toward widespread adherence. The key question is: how many actors must adopt the new norm or comply with the normative shift—before this tipping point is reached, and societies spontaneously converge on the new normative traction? (see Andreoni, Nikiforakis and Siegenthaler, 2021) For such positive tipping points for climate action, climate movements are proven crucial. Lenton, shows this through what he terms as the “Greta effect” (2025, pp. 121–138)—where persuasion plays a role through advocacy by agents (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998; Payne, 2001) and often sustained through norm clusters.¹⁹⁴

Changes in global norms can be traced through key negotiation milestones, often influenced by moral arguments from climate movements, parallel legal and scientific developments, public discourse, and media coverage. The role of climate movements, TANs, and campaigns play a strategic role, serving as a common thread advancing global norms across these arenas through interconnected advocacy platforms.¹⁹⁵ Tracing the influence of climate movements on the integration of global norms into UNFCCC COP negotiations reveals that many of these norms initially circulated at the margins—within side events, informal dialogues, and preambular references—before gradually permeating the formal negotiating language and gaining legitimacy through iterative COP outcomes.¹⁹⁶ Simultaneously, external legal (e.g., court rulings) and scientific developments (e.g., IPCC assessments), along with parallel negotiation processes for frameworks (e.g., biodiversity, plastics, and more), reinforce(d) norm acceptance, prompting negotiators to acknowledge their relevance and necessity. Vulnerable states, often mobilising alliances with climate movements and TANs, successfully lobbied for more explicit norm inclusion—a dynamic accelerated over time as more parties recognised the

¹⁹⁴ See *Chapter 4: Global Norms and International Climate Negotiations – Section 4.2. Normative Overlaps*

¹⁹⁵ Interview with IP012

¹⁹⁶ Interview with IP012, IP013

moral urgency, political feasibility, and climate-driven pressures justifying these evolving normative standards.

5.1.1 Argumentation

The third stage, argumentation, in the Theory on *Cycles of Norm Change* (Sandholz 2017)¹⁹⁷ is where the fluid and contested nature of norms becomes most visible, as actors attempt to reshape shared understandings and persuade others to embrace alternative interpretations. In the context of international climate negotiations, this stage is highly dynamic and often unfolds in multiple spaces: formal negotiation sessions, corridor talks at COPs, side events, civil society workshops, and media interventions, webinars and live broadcasts—where various coalitions seek to frame the debate on evolving normative issues. An interviewee observes this:

They [civil society] raise their voices outside of the formal process—through side events and academic communities like yours. Side events, I think, are a valuable opportunity to make those voices heard. [...] As negotiators, we are often educated by civil society and academics. (Interview with IP06)

Here, the argumentation strategies employed by climate movements within and around the negotiations are observed. Argumentation involves deliberate and strategic deployment of moral, ethical, and legal justifications to influence the preferences and interests of other actors (see Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998; Ulbert and Risse, 2005; Deitelhoff and Zimmermann, 2020). For instance, persistent argumentation by advocacy groups and vulnerable states for anti-fossil fuel norms facilitated powerful discursive shift¹⁹⁸—where fossil fuels were synonymised with harm and injustice.¹⁹⁹ Consequently, fossil fuels were linked to climate justice imperatives (Nisbett and Spaiser, 2023), historical responsibilities (Green, 2018a; Ann Samuel, 2026a) and human rights concerns (Brysk, 2000, 2018; Wallbott and Schapper, 2017). Norm entrepreneurs or champions—including states, intergovernmental organisations or non-governmental organisations (NGOs)—draw upon scientific evidence (e.g., IPCC reports), human rights obligations, economic fairness narratives, and ethical imperatives to reframe party positions during the negotiations.

¹⁹⁷ See *Chapter 2 Literature Review - Section 2.1.2 and Section 2.1.3*

¹⁹⁸ Interview with IP12; See also, *Chapter 4: Global Norms and International Climate Negotiations – Section 4.3.1 Anti-Fossil Fuel Norms*

¹⁹⁹ Interview with IP12

In the stage of argumentation, actors engage in deliberate alignment of multiple norms to produce a cohesive and mutually reinforcing discourse.²⁰⁰ For example, the campaign to operationalise Loss and Damage norms leveraged argumentation that integrated the concept of intergenerational equity,²⁰¹ human rights²⁰² and climate justice.²⁰³ By portraying Loss and Damage as a clear moral debt owed by historical polluters to those suffering irreversible harm (United Nations, 2024), climate movements transcended purely financial frames and appealed to a suite of related principles—like equity, intergenerational justice, the polluter pays principle, and the right to a healthy environment—that elevated the moral stakes. An interviewee observes how such strategic alignment of multiple norms by climate movements show norm permeation of the negotiations:²⁰⁴

What is significant about loss and damage is that it emerged from external movements—it didn't originate within the formal process. And it didn't happen overnight; it took around 10 to 15 years of sustained advocacy for it to gain traction and enter the formal agenda. That really illustrates how semi-permeable the boundary is between what's outside and what gets taken up inside the process. Things can move in and out, but it takes time and pressure. (Interview with IP20)

Here, the boundaries of climate negotiations are observed as “semi-permeable,” implying that while civil society can exert influence, it remains constrained and requires sustained advocacy to overcome institutional resistance and inertia. This selective openness highlights the uneven power dynamics that determine which ideas are adopted and how long the process takes. To sustain an argument for continued diffusion of global norm(s), re-emphasis of moral framings is continuously seen throughout different advocacy tactics.²⁰⁵ Moreover, argumentation unfolds against a backdrop of uncertainty and evolving normative understandings. As new evidence emerges about climate impacts, the moral landscape shifts, allowing norm entrepreneurs and champions to refine their arguments and test which framings resonate most with both negotiators and the global public.²⁰⁶ Over time, as certain argumentative frames gain traction, they begin to shape the expectations of parties and other stakeholders.

In summary, argumentation (third stage) is the creative engine room of norm evolution. It is where coalitions are formed, moral claims are tested, and normative clusters are assembled. By

²⁰⁰ See *Chapter 4: Global Norms and International Climate Negotiations – Section 4.2. Normative Overlaps*

²⁰¹ Interview with IP03, IP15

²⁰² Interview with IP03, IP15

²⁰³ Interview with IP06

²⁰⁴ See empirical evidence of norm permeation by climate movements in the paper by [Nisbett and Spaiser, \(2023\)](#)

²⁰⁵ Interview with IP01, IP13, IP20,

²⁰⁶ See *Chapter 6: Norm Champions and Norm Antipreneurs*

amplifying certain norms through persuasive moral and ethical arguments, climate advocates lay the groundwork for norm change/modification, thereby shaping the evolving normative architecture of global climate governance. Argumentation sets the stage for the next phase: norm modification/change (Sandholtz, 2017).

5.1.2 The Transition:

The transition from argumentation to norm change unfolds across three interrelated dimensions. The first dimension is that it involves securing the political will of key actors. Once a critical mass of actors is persuaded momentum shifts towards codifying these redefined norms (see Andreoni, Nikiforakis and Siegenthaler, 2021; Nikiforakis, Siegenthaler and Andreoni, 2021). For instance, persistent arguments linking Loss and Damage norms to Climate Justice norms eventually led to the creation of the Loss and Damage Fund at COP27,²⁰⁷ thereby embedding a norm that for decades had remained disputed. A negotiator notes this:

The push for loss and damage has been going on under the title of climate justice for quite some time, since even the [start] of the negotiations. But it never gained traction beyond a dialogue in clusters. But the perfect storm happened in Sharm El-Sheikh.
(Interview with IP04)

Here, while the interviewee mentions the normative shift, they acknowledge that it occurred not merely because of climate movements, but also due to increased receptivity within the negotiations process²⁰⁸—thus, securing the political will.

The second dimension is marked by institutional anchoring. Even before formal decisions are taken, norm entrepreneurs and champions test and refine their arguments in side-events, workshops, and informal gatherings, studying potential coalitions and seeking endorsement from multiple constituencies e.g. vulnerable states, youth delegates, indigenous peoples, NGOs, and even segments of the private sector.²⁰⁹ Here, institutional anchoring refers to the process through which emerging norms gain stability and legitimacy within established organisational structures, creating multiple points of connection and support within the existing system. Gunningham's (2017). research illustrates this through the case of 350.org, an NGO founded by Bill McKibben and six students, which successfully persuaded 688 institutions and over 58,000 individuals across 76 countries to divest from fossil fuel companies due to climate

²⁰⁷ Interview with IP04

²⁰⁸ See *Chapter 4: Global Norms and International Climate Negotiation - Section 4.3.5 Loss and Damage Norms* – to know what constituted “the perfect storm” and consequently the sudden receptivity.

²⁰⁹ Interview with IP06

concerns—all within less than a decade of its founding. Although 350.org's targets and strategies primarily involve the private sector, the diffusion of anti-fossil fuel norms through grassroots activism and transnational movements provides a plausible explanation of how such efforts were instrumental not only in attempting to limit lobbyists' influence at UNFCCC COP negotiations, but also in diversifying campaign strategies toward "keeping it in the ground," "just financing for just energy transition," and other approaches (Odenthal, 2021). It can be critiqued that lobbyists have continued to maintain a presence at COPs (see Igini, 2023; KBPO, 2023; Lakhani, 2023); however, this does not negate the *bona fide* attempts made by norm entrepreneurs. Moreover, by aligning closely with climate justice norms, these movements have placed "a lot of pressure coming from the streets for negotiators to deliver something" (Odenthal, 2021). This represents a classic example of norm diffusion, where globally resonant norms—originating in local grassroots efforts—ultimately influence formal negotiations.

The third dimension is the explicit visibility of the norm change in guiding behaviours. Prior to the fourth stage (i.e., norm change/modification)²¹⁰ norms remain fluid: open to reinterpretation, prone to challenge, and contingent on actor persuasion (Sandholtz, 2017). Once a norm has been modified (or changed), parties increasingly treat it as a default reference point. This does not mean that normative evolution halts; to the contrary, modified norms can themselves become the foundation for future argumentation cycles. For example, the formal mention of fossil fuels in the *Glasgow Climate Pact* and the subsequent operationalisation of the Loss and Damage Fund at COP28 now serve as anchors to further facilitate climate justice, human rights, and more.²¹¹ Likewise, explicitly calling for transitioning away from fossil fuels in one agreement is far from ensuring that parties will expeditiously phase them out. A negotiator from a Small Island Developing State notes:

Within the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement, negotiations around market mechanisms—and the accountability structures tied to them—are more likely to deliver meaningful change than ongoing semantic debates over whether to "phase out," "phase down," or "transition away" from fossil fuels. (Interview with IP19)

Here, the gap between rhetorical progress and institutional effectiveness, suggests that enforceable mechanisms offer more plausible normative traction than negotiating contested language in texts—though without undermining the value of such discourse. Revised

²¹⁰ See *Chapter 2: Review of Theory*, to observe how "norm change" and "norm modification" are synonymously used.

²¹¹ See *Chapter 7: COP Negotiation Processes, The Cover Decisions, and Normative Gains*

normative baselines shape expectations and intensify scrutiny, making noncompliance or resistance more politically costly.

Norm change does not guarantee uniform implementation or universal compliance. While broad acceptance leads to codification, variations in how states interpret, operationalise, or enforce the norm always persist (Deitelhoff and Zimmermann, 2020). Historical emitters may endorse a Loss and Damage Fund but remain reluctant to channel substantial resources towards it, forcing another cycle of argumentation over implementation details and the scope of affected communities. This is called out by a UN official who stressed:

The Loss and Damage Fund—while it is great that it now exists—the contributions made at COP28 were, frankly, embarrassing. The amounts pledged were pathetic. For example, if you compare the USD 700 million in pledges to the annual profits of just six of the world’s largest fossil fuel companies. You’re looking at USD 700 million [commitment] for USD 360 billion [economic loss] in a single year. [...] To me, this is not rocket science. The money is there. What’s needed is for states to do their job: tax the windfall profits of fossil fuel companies through carbon taxes and windfall profit taxes. And honestly, we should also have wealth taxes on the richest one or two percent of humanity. [Such] funding sources could generate hundreds of billions of dollars annually—resources that could go into the Loss and Damage Fund and help make life bearable for people in small island and coastal states. There is a catastrophic disparity between the funds available and the funds actually committed. (Interview with IP05)²¹²

The interviewee critiques the gap between symbolic progress and material commitment in relation to the Loss and Damage Fund. The clear inadequate funding²¹³ for the Loss and Damage Fund illustrates a key feature of the fourth stage of norm change where there is tension between normative anchoring and contested implementation. While the Fund’s establishment marks a formal recognition of responsibility, anchoring its implementation in institutional discourse, triggers a new cycle of argumentation over compliance, adequacy, and fairness.

In conclusion, the transition from argumentation (third stage) to norm modification/change (fourth stage) in Sandholtz’s (2017) framework represents the moment when persuasive discursive efforts coalesce into institutionalised standards. With sufficient traction, the preferred interpretations by climate movements, TANs and civil society become codified in

²¹² See *Chapter 4: Global Norms and International Climate Negotiations - Section 4.3.5 Loss and Damage Norms*

²¹³ See [Lakhani, \(2023\)](#) to read the figures around contributions pledged at COP28. Also see [Leahy, \(2025\)](#) to read about the \$360 billion annual economic loss from climate change, extreme weather and health costs because of air pollution.

official texts, mechanisms, and procedures, signalling a reconfiguration of the normative environment.²¹⁴

5.2 Influences

Here, the chapter analyses how the referenced global norms influence negotiations and agreements. The section is structured into two. First, I delve into how climate movements act and enhance the diffusion of the global norms into the international climate negotiations [*Section 5.2.1*]. Here, a detailed understanding of framing strategies, coalition building, lobbying and direct engagement, of each of these influences, will be studied. Second, specific trends and dynamics within the UNFCCC to enhance the influences are studied [*Section 5.2.2*].

5.2.1 Climate Movements: Norm Entrepreneurs

Global climate negotiations have evolved drastically under the strategic influence of climate movements (see Ann Samuel, 2023; Padilla-Castillo and Rodríguez-Hernández, 2023).

As I proceed to unpack the nuances of how global norms by climate movements influence negotiations, an important clarification is necessary. Here, the traditional distinctions between norm entrepreneurs and norm champions often become blurred, and more so in such a complex and nuanced understanding of climate movements and negotiations. This chapter identifies their roles as separate and unique. By analysing climate movements as primary vehicles for seeding global norms in UNFCCC COP negotiations, I underscore how norm entrepreneurs (i.e., climate movements and TANs collectively, as well as individual actors within such movements and advocacy networks) employ various tactics that serve as mechanisms of influence. These tactics include framing strategies, coalition building, lobbying, and direct engagement—through which norms clusters collide and interact in complex political dynamics.

This section of the chapter proceeds in three parts. First, I will examine how the eight referenced global norms have diffused in the negotiations through climate movements [*Part 5.2.1.1*].²¹⁵ Second, I explore how climate movements embrace different tactics and strategies, dividing the sub-section into three parts: framing, coalitions and lobbying, and barriers to

²¹⁴ See *Chapter 7: COP Negotiation Processes, The Cover Decisions, and Normative Gains*

²¹⁵ It is important to note that the analysis of the eight norms in this chapter differs from that in *Chapter 4*. While *Chapter 4* examined how each global norm was referenced across UNFCCC COPs, *Chapter 5* builds on this by analysing how climate movements influence the diffusion of these norms. Although *Chapter 4* briefly acknowledged the presence of climate movements, it did not address their central role in norm diffusion—an aspect that is explored in depth in *Chapter 5*.

influence [*Part 5.2.1.2*]. Finally, I explore other factors beyond UNFCCC (like climate litigation) that are impacted by climate movements and can directly and/or indirectly affect the negotiations [*Part 5.2.1.3*].

5.2.1.1 Tracing Influences

Here, I examine how the eight global norms are influencing the climate negotiations, and how climate movements as norm entrepreneurs are catalysing them. While some norms have successfully permeated formal agreements (like human rights in the Paris Agreement), others remain at the periphery of negotiations (such as ecocide). In addition, I seek to explore both the successes and limitations of climate movements as influence, recognising that norm diffusion operates through complex interplays between external pressure and internal negotiation dynamics.

5.2.1.1.1 Anti-fossil fuel norms:

Climate movements have grown throughout successive COPs, with specific references to targeted advocacy strategies.²¹⁶ External pressure through climate movements to address the transition away from fossil fuels has been notable across the globe, albeit facing varying degrees of political inertia, opposition, and/or support. The push from these movements, however, reflects a world where such a shift is now increasingly conceivable compared to 15 or 30 years ago.²¹⁷ The support of civil society for negotiators adds strength, as a negotiator observed during the interview:

By having demonstrations and actions within the venue demanding the phasing out of fossil fuels, of course, supports those in the negotiation—those that want to put forward these issues. So even though there is no direct link, it is more legitimate. When you put forward your position in negotiations, you know you have civil society backing. Sometimes you get statements from civil society that support you, and that enhances the legitimacy of particular statements [in negotiations]. (Interview with IP04)

However, whether a “direct link” exists between civil society actions and negotiation outcomes remains contested, as the interviewee observed. Although the UNFCCC COP negotiation space does not promote direct influence of the civil societies in the negotiation, there are official constituencies which are groupings of non-governmental organisations (NGOs),²¹⁸ who in the UNFCCC COPs have permission to speak in the negotiation rooms.

²¹⁶ See *Chapter 4: Global Norms and International Climate Negotiations - Section - 4.3.1 Anti-Fossil Fuel Norms* to explore how anti-fossil fuel norms were referenced at the COPs.

²¹⁷ Interview with IP16

²¹⁸ See *Chapter 5: Influence of Global Norms on Negotiations and Agreements – Section 5.2.1.2.2 Coalition Building and Political Campaigning*

The influence and role of advocacy is strong during the negotiations. For instance, a negotiator observed how anti-fossil fuel norms, championed by norm entrepreneurs like climate justice activists, advocacy groups from Small Island Developing States, transnational advocacy networks, has become a central driver of progress in climate negotiations. While it is a collective effort involving governments, observers, and diverse stakeholders, the momentum around fossil fuel phase-out has increasingly shaped the agenda, making it harder to isolate any single group as solely responsible for breakthroughs.

Certainly, the presence of the climate justice movements and activists influence both the governments and the overall discourse. Of course, Small Island Developing States, and the High Ambition Coalition of states have been calling for this as well. The vast majority of states would have supported and did support much stronger language on fossil fuel phase-out. That is why I say it is hard to attribute an outcome to a particular group because all of these things involve a very broad coalition. We work very closely with member states, and we have a group of friends of human rights among these states. We also work closely to convene observers and states. The efforts are collective. It is difficult to attribute progress to any one actor, but it is certainly an important push. Having observers there keeps governments on their toes. Some of them take inputs from observers very seriously. In ongoing negotiations, they will come and ask for views on particular language. There are relationships that people build over time across these different types of interactions, and that eventually leads to some of the more positive outcomes. (Interview with IP03)

In addition, civil society and specifically youth activists, NGOs, think tanks and more—consistently applied pressure to name and shame fossil fuel lobbyists and fossil fuel champions,²¹⁹ at times accompanied by researchers.²²⁰ In COP24, YOUNGO was vocal in pressing the negotiations to implement radical measures to exclude fossil fuel lobbies from COP proceedings (IISD Earth Negotiations Bulletin, 2019). *Climate Justice Now!* criticised governments for "ignoring the clear, simple solution" of keeping fossil fuels unexploited while demanding subsidy elimination (IISD Earth Negotiations Bulletin, 2019, p. 25). At the final plenary of COP25, a youth delegate from Norway lamented insufficient ambition to reach the 1.5°C goal and urged parties to "take the right decisions for our future." (IISD Earth Negotiations Bulletin, 2019, p. 25). Over time, mounting scientific evidence from the IPCC, International Energy Agency (IEA), and other sources, coupled with social movements and grassroots campaigning, helped push fossil fuels into the negotiation spotlight. As such, these various actors forced parties to acknowledge the critical importance of transitioning away from

²¹⁹ Specifically, IP01, IP02, IP04, IP05, IP06, IP07, IP08, IP10, IP11, IP12, IP16, IP19, IP20.

²²⁰ Interview with IP06

fossil fuels and to rehearse a global phase-down of fossil fuels as a critical part of the solution to meet the Paris goals.

This also amounts to giving meaning to phrases which climate movements and civil societies have the power to do:

I think ultimately it is a political choice and it is about giving a meaning to the terms again, right? If the decision had said phasing out fossil fuels instead of transitioning away, I do not think the effect would have been different. Honestly, I think if civil society had not embraced the term transitioning away and said it means actually exactly the same as phasing out because it means we have to move away and we have to get away, I think it would actually help. And in a way, it was a bit counterproductive, or that is the criticism, that it now says transitioning away because it gives the idea that it is less strong. But I think one could turn it around and say, well, transitioning away means there has to be an end in the same way phasing out means (Interview with IP04).

Consequently, the moral understanding remains contingent on public discourse translation. While climate movements propagate anti-fossil fuel norms, they may inadvertently impede progress through divergent interpretations. For instance, what constitutes moral rightness for China (e.g., "phasing down") may represent moral inadequacy for Small Island Developing States (SIDS). Hence, the way climate movements interpret and communicate these terms can have unintended consequences. By assigning specific meanings to terminology, they may inadvertently reinforce certain positions that align with some parties' interests while opposing others.

While some interviewees expressed concern about the UNFCCC's multilateralism *per se* and how anti-fossil fuel norms might diffuse amid constant divergence in negotiating agenda item,²²¹ others emphasised how initiatives like fossil-fuel non-proliferation treaty and related campaigns bring resilience to these norms.²²² However, a few other interviewees remained highly sceptical of the fossil fuel non-proliferation treaty and its effects on anti-fossil fuel norms.²²³

Climate movements play a dual role in climate negotiations: as legitimisers and norm entrepreneurs. They exert external pressure and add moral weight through demonstrations, advocacy, and public discourse. This support enhances the credibility of progressive positions

²²¹ Interview with IP16, IP02, IP14, IP17

²²² Interview with IP16

²²³ Interview with IP06, IP19

but can also produce unforeseen effects—especially when specific framings or terminology align with some parties’ interests while conflicting with others.

5.2.1.1.2 Climate Justice norms:

Climate justice norms are deeply rooted in climate movements (Ann Samuel, 2026a). Climate movements have played a critical role in shaping and advancing climate justice norms, particularly through the engagement of interest-specific non-state actors. Analysing the contributions of these actors—like Indigenous organisations, feminist collectives, youth-led and grassroots movements, labour unions—is essential to understanding how climate justice discourses remain intersectional, cutting across diverse activist agendas. These varied thematic engagements result in differentiated levels of influence, visibility, and normative impact in and around the negotiations.

Over the years, civil society groups and movements legitimated concepts like “just transition” and “keep it in the ground,” linking them to broader social and economic justice struggles and discourses.²²⁴ However, though broader movements and advocacy frames increasingly incorporate climate justice norms, an interviewee notes the need for actors to actively translate these discourses into actionable strategies across diverse social contexts:

So again, the fact that climate justice movements—whether youth-led, Indigenous, or others—are raising issues at the international level is significant. The impact, of course, varies from country to country, and so does the strength of their voices. But they can be important actors in the conversation. The real challenge is figuring out how to move beyond slogans and find meaningful ways to engage in dialogue on difficult questions. It is easy to walk into a room and hold up a placard saying, "Climate justice now," [...] It is much harder to sit down and begin a dialogue with someone whose livelihood depends on coal mining, or whose entire career has revolved around maintaining internal combustion engine vehicles. We need to reimagine and retrain for a different future. Bringing those conversations together is crucial. There is a French phrase for this—*convergence des luttes*—which means the coming together of different struggles. This idea came up a lot during the "*gilets jaunes*"²²⁵ (yellow vests) protests in France a few years ago; people were worried about immediate survival. At the same time, there is also a need to connect those [immediate] concerns with broader issues like climate change, biodiversity loss, and environmental justice (Interview with IP16).

²²⁴ Interview with IP02; Also, see *Chapter 5: Influence of Global Norms on Negotiations and Agreements – Section 5.1.2 The Transition*, where the movement 350.org is highlighted and normative overlaps of “climate justice norms” and “anti-fossil fuel norms” are observed.

²²⁵ The *Gilets Jaunes* (French for “Yellow Vests”) is a grassroots protest movement in France that began in late 2018. It was initially triggered by rising fuel taxes and the high cost of living, particularly affecting people in rural and peri-urban areas who rely on cars for commuting. Protesters wore high-visibility yellow vests—*gilets jaunes*—which are mandatory for French motorists to carry, making them both a practical and symbolic emblem of the movement (see Chrisafis, 2018).

Central to the interviewee's observation is the need for normative momentum generated by climate movements to be translated into inclusive and pragmatic policy transitions. These concerns subtly highlight a disjuncture between moral clarity and political efficacy. While slogans and protests can galvanise attention and articulate demands, the more difficult political task lies in negotiating shared futures with those whose livelihoods are tied to fossil-fuel dependent sectors. He specifies that collating these intersecting 'struggles' for negotiated outcomes is key for climate justice; as such noting the French phrase '*convergence des luttes*' (see Felicetti and Della Porta, 2018; Groux and Robert, 2020). This socio-political concept refers to the alignment of diverse social groups: such as labour, environmental, feminist, and anti-racist movements—around shared goals. It emphasises building collective solidarity to strengthen political influence against structures perceived as unjust or oppressive. In this context, coalition-building across class, geography, and epistemology becomes essential, particularly where environmental and economic vulnerabilities intersect. Yet, as the interviewee critiques, these complexities are often eclipsed within dominant climate justice narratives; implying how siloed approaches to climate governance, comes short of holding together both decarbonisation and distributive justice.

The need for integrative, intersectional approaches is increasingly echoed within formal climate institutions and platforms like Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform (LCIPP),²²⁶ where mechanisms are evolving to better accommodate the voices and rights of historically marginalised groups. The inclusion of human rights language in the Paris Agreement preamble marks an important institutional advance, demonstrating a growing recognition that climate policy must be grounded in equity and the protection of vulnerable communities. Over time Indigenous Peoples and other historically marginalised groups have gained more structured participation in climate negotiations: an achievement reflected in the gradual shift toward giving them a seat at the decision-making table. As one interviewee noted:

Indigenous Peoples have fought for hundreds of years [...] United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is such an important recognition [...] There are some challenges... but these discussions are fundamental to indigenous peoples, their representation, participation, and self-determination. (Interview with IP03)

²²⁶ The Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform (LCIPP) is a forum established by the UNFCCC. Its operational arm, the Facilitative Working Group (FWG), advances the LCIPP's mandate by facilitating knowledge exchange, capacity-building, and the integration of indigenous perspectives into climate-change policies and actions.

This incremental empowerment underscores the rise of climate justice narratives that emphasise self-determination and meaningful engagement, even when institutional mandates fall short of community aspirations. For example, the interviewee recollected a vague incident in which indigenous representatives on the LCIPP sought to present specific recommendations directly to the COP, only to be told that governments “didn’t have a mandate to do that.”²²⁷ He was a witness to it. The LCIPP was established as a facilitative and advisory body rather than a negotiating forum under the UNFCCC. While it enables knowledge-sharing and capacity-building, its outputs carry no binding effect, and recommendations require party endorsement to be reflected in COP decisions. This structural limitation often leads governments to invoke the absence of a ‘mandate’ when declining to act directly on proposals from Indigenous representatives²²⁸ (Legal Response International, 2019). Despite such setbacks, these developments highlight the growing influence of indigenous perspectives in global climate governance and illustrate how formal structures—like the LCIPP and key human rights declarations—are gradually reshaping the climate justice landscape to be more inclusive and equitable.²²⁹

In addition to the indigenous peoples’ and organisations’ in catalysing climate movements and networks for influencing the diffusion of climate justice norms, the relevance of gender and just transition is also observed to have had traction over the years because of climate movements. A UNFCCC official observes this:

I would say that even before COP24, both gender and just transition issues were already present, but they’ve become much more mainstream in recent years. Gender, in particular, is now integrated across much of our [UNFCCC] work. Just transition—especially in terms of what it means for specific sectors, communities, or workers—is also receiving a lot more attention. These issues aren’t entirely new; they’ve always been there to some extent. And I hesitate to call them new, because the people [movement] who have been working on these topics would rightly point out that they’ve been doing so for decades. (Interview with IP09)

Here, climate movements are instrumental not only in advancing climate justice as a normative framework, but also in embedding intersectional concerns such as gender and labour equity as observed by the interviewee—within the institutional vocabulary and operational focus of the

²²⁷ Interview with IP03

²²⁸ The implementation of the LCIPP and its Facilitative Working Group (FWG) must align with international law, as stipulated in Decision 2/CP.24, and may also be shaped by relevant domestic legal frameworks of the Parties (see Legal Response International, 2019).

²²⁹ Interview with IP03

UNFCCC. This reinforces the importance of non-state actors as drivers of normative change in global environmental politics.

In sum, climate movements serve as key agents in advancing climate justice norms, not only by foregrounding issues like indigenous rights, gender, and just transition, but also by pressuring institutions like the UNFCCC to incorporate them into formal agendas. However, there remains a persistent disjuncture between normative rhetoric and negotiated action. The need for deeper coalition-building emerges as critical to reconciling diverse struggles and advancing equitable decarbonisation. Despite incremental institutional gains, such as the LCIPP, the influence of marginalised groups remains constrained by limited mandates and procedural barriers, revealing the ongoing contestation at the intersection of justice, power, and geography.

5.2.1.1.3 Intergenerational equity norms:

Influence of climate movements in diffusing intergenerational equity norms occurs through two main pathways within climate negotiations. First, youth-led climate movements play a central role by embodying the principle itself—claiming moral authority as representatives of future generations and applying direct pressure on negotiators to recognise these obligations. Second, broader civil society movements—reinforce and broaden intergenerational equity norms through intersecting framings of justice and equity. This section traces both influences.

Climate movements, particularly youth-led initiatives are instrumental in embedding intergenerational equity within climate negotiations by creating public pressure and moral imperatives. A negotiator noted that the period from 2016 to 2020 was particularly impactful regarding youth movements' influence in diffusing intergenerational equity norms.²³⁰ However, this view is contested, as other interviewees suggest a longer continuum of influence beginning with the Paris era in 2015.²³¹ Over successive COPs, it is observed how youth activists, as representatives of future generations, have increasingly framed climate inaction as a violation of intergenerational justice, elevating this narrative in public discourse and making it increasingly difficult for negotiators to ignore.²³² The broader political and moral pressure exerted by these movements ensures that intergenerational justice gain visibility and salience.

²³⁰ Interview with IP02

²³¹ Interview with IP01, IP04

²³² Interview with IP05

Moreover, the scale and timing of youth movements vary, depending on when they set their agendas for protests or campaigns. A negotiator observes:

Youth engagement, in particular, tends to differ significantly depending on timing—whether it occurs outside the COPs or during them. The nature of this engagement is typically quite different in each context (Interview with IP02)

This is complemented by what another interviewee observed:

[As a negotiator] you gather at COP to present the work you've done throughout the year. But then COP somehow ended up being very glamorous [...] However, the actual work happens well before the COP. By the time you arrive, everything is mostly determined. There are only a few last-minute details being finalised; the substantive talks happen much earlier. That's really where attention should be focused. But because of how the multilateral system and the diplomatic space function—and because many people don't fully understand that—media tends to highlight only certain events, and that shapes what the public knows. (Interview with IP20)

By reading the above two interview quotes together,²³³ the analysis highlights a key temporal disconnect in youth engagement with climate negotiations. While youth mobilisation peaks during COPs due to their visibility and symbolic value, actual negotiation outcomes are shaped well in advance. The agenda and party (country) positions for each agenda, are largely determined before the COP—with only minor details resolved during the event. This underscores a structural misalignment: youth engagement tends to peak when media visibility is highest, yet their influence during pre-COP processes remains sporadic and contingent, even though its impact is nonetheless significant and cumulative. Strategic interventions prior to and in the lead-up to COPs can therefore enhance their presence and effectiveness during the negotiations.

It also illustrates that normative influence is not singularly event-driven, but rather the cumulative result of sustained and targeted engagement across pre-COP processes. Interviews reveal how movements also leverage observer status, youth pavilions, and side events at COPs to amplify their message.²³⁴ Although often sidelined, these platforms enabled persistent advocacy for meaningful inclusion of youth voices in decision-making processes.

In addition, a young negotiator, who witnessed protests at COP spaces and how it influenced the negotiations, emphasised the important role of the public discourse and the role media has played in shaping this discourse and its effect:

²³³ Analysis of Interview quotes of IP02 and IP20

²³⁴ Interview with IP01, IP08, IP12, IP13

Yes, I certainly think, you know the youth movement and Indigenous voices are very much an important part of the COP process. At COP 27, there were several demonstrations that were organised in front of negotiation rooms. I remember people standing and protesting for phasing out of fossil fuels. And at COP 28 in Dubai, the same thing, they had a huge mark on one of the days where, it was everything from, like giving land back to Indigenous People to, phasing out fossil fuels to against deep sea mining. I mean, all kinds of things. And I think it really does make a difference. Because, their presence signals to negotiators and to countries that these issues are important; of course [...] they also receive a lot of media coverage. So, inside the COP process, they get a lot of attention, but also outside on international TV media screens, I think. For young people and Indigenous People to be at, COP is very important, because [...] their voices are heard and they're able to raise these issues and share their perspective from a first-hand account. (Interview with IP08)

Negotiators highlight the need for activists to continually push for a transition from tokenism to substantive engagement.²³⁵ Through combined efforts of moral advocacy, strategic use of COP platforms, and the training of young negotiators. The work of climate movements has ensured that the voices and rights of future generations remain central to the climate agenda. Moreover, informal interactions between movements and negotiators, such as discussions in hallways or at side events, often facilitated micro-level persuasion.²³⁶ These engagements have allowed negotiators to incorporate intergenerational concerns into non-binding documents without committing to legally burdensome obligations, contributing to incremental normative shifts.

Here, even as I focus primarily on youth movements, I acknowledge that intergenerational equity norms are not diffused through their efforts alone. Reducing the influence on these norms exclusively to youth movements would be problematic. Climate justice movements—including Indigenous Peoples and organisations, feminist movements, and others—have contributed to the diffusion of intergenerational equity norms through their intersecting advocacy across civil society. Notably, their support for the diffusion of other global norms, such as ecocide, often intersects with and reinforces youth-led efforts around intergenerational equity.²³⁷

Further the movements by older people, or involvement of older people in youth-led movements are strategic and noted in various reports and literature (see Chazan and Baldwin, 2019; ESCAP, 2021; Bogado, 2025). For instance, interviewees recalled how the late Saleemul

²³⁵ Interview with IP01, IP08

²³⁶ Interview with IP06, IP08

²³⁷ Interview with IP12

Huq's²³⁸ meetings with young climate activists and encouragement of youth movements served as a powerful example—often empowering the youth through person-to-person mentorship.²³⁹ In addition, interviewees shared experiences where the interviewees (experts, diplomats, UN officials, negotiators etc) themselves have been instrumental in bolstering youth movements for intergenerational equity norms.²⁴⁰

5.2.1.1.4 Human right norms:

The very incorporation of human rights in the Paris Agreement was driven by social and climate movements. Social movements including trade unions, youth, women's groups, and environmental NGOs—coalesced around a shared goal.²⁴¹ Their collective advocacy resulted in human rights language being incorporated into the preamble of the Paris Agreement. An interviewee observed as follows:

During the negotiations of the Paris Agreement, a cross-constituency group collectively advocated for the integration of human rights in the Paris Agreement. They all got behind a paragraph that they agreed to, which is essentially now the language of the preamble of the Paris Agreement. (Interview with IP03)

A negotiator from Norway recounted the intense emotional response of civil society organisations and climate movement actors when the reference to human rights in the Paris Agreement was shifted from the operative text to the preamble during negotiations.²⁴² After Paris Agreement, human rights norms were continuously advanced by climate movements across COP24 to COP28, often linked with intergeneration equity and justice or climate justice.²⁴³ For instance, an interviewee observed how at COP28 youth climate activists were championing the cause for climate justice and human rights together:

I think overall at COP28, there was more activism. You probably saw it on television where the young climate activist talked about the Palestinian genocide and about phasing out fossil fuels. (Interview with IP08)

This indicates that youth climate activists at COP28 were actively foregrounding the interconnectedness of justice struggles—framing climate action as inseparable from broader

²³⁸ Late Prof. Saleemul Huq OBE, was a Bangladeshi-British scientist, served as Director of Bangladesh's International Centre for Climate Change & Development and was also a professor at Independent University, Bangladesh. In 2022, he was recognised by Nature as one of the year's top 10 scientists. He was a leading advisor for Least Developed Countries (LDC) in the UNFCCC negotiations.

²³⁹ Interview with IP01, IP06

²⁴⁰ Interview with IP01, IP02, IP04, IP05, IP12, IP19, IP20

²⁴¹ Interview with IP03

²⁴² Interview with IP03

²⁴³ Interview with IP03

human rights concerns and highlighting the indivisibility of social, environmental, and intergenerational justice.

Further, human rights norms from wider social movements influenced climate movements which in turn permeated the negotiations. For instance, the movement for right to clean healthy and sustainable environment has had compounding effects at COPs.²⁴⁴ For instance, an interviewee noted:

The recognition of the right to a clean and healthy environment, as well as sustainable development, as a human right, which has gained significant momentum over the last two years. There is been a very strong movement around that (IP02).

The campaign to have the UN General Assembly recognise it as a human right has coincided with significant legal, legislative, and policymaking developments, which have collectively accelerated the diffusion of this norm within UNFCCC COP spaces as well.²⁴⁵

Both human rights and climate justice function as meta-norms, offering structural flexibility that enables the clustering of other norms for strategic framing and diffusion. However, human rights norms hold a distinct legal status in addition to their moral weight, as a result, contestation around human rights norms tends to be more pronounced, often eliciting explicit support or opposition from parties. An interviewee expresses the same:

There are certain cultural and constitutional barriers and challenges that still exist—even at the multilateral level. Because of some countries' national or constitutional positions, we're not able to push for certain things. (Interview with IP20)

This matters because the legal status of human rights norms makes them more politically sensitive, limiting the space for advocacy within multilateral forums. As the interviewee suggests, national constraints often prevent negotiators from endorsing rights-based language, reducing the traction that climate movements and transnational networks might otherwise achieve through human rights framing. Further, the complication of the interpretation of what and how climate movements can influence human rights norms diffusion is also contested.

The human rights regime is very *à la carte*²⁴⁶—different parties sign on to different human rights agreements, and most countries have varying interpretations of what constitutes human rights. It is a complicated area, especially in the context of international law and practice. For example, some parties view the right to development

²⁴⁴ Interview with IP03, IP05

²⁴⁵ Interview with IP05

²⁴⁶ The phrase “à la carte” is borrowed from French and literally means “according to the menu.”. Simply put and integrating to this context; the interviewee implied that human rights are “selectively chosen”

as a human right, while others do not. They may instead prioritise rights like equal treatment under the law. So, there is considerable divergence in how human rights are understood and applied. (Interview with IP18)

The divergent interpretations of human rights across states present a significant challenge for climate movements and transnational advocacy networks seeking to promote these norms within climate negotiations. As the interviewee notes, the human rights regime is highly fragmented, with parties endorsing different treaties and holding conflicting views on what qualifies as a human right. This complexity undermines the effectiveness of human rights as a shared normative framework.

In sum, it can be observed how the diffusion of human rights norms within climate negotiations is both catalysed and constrained by the strategic efforts of climate and broader social movements. While these norms offer strong moral and legal legitimacy, their contested status and fragmented interpretations across states limit their universal traction. This tension reveals how the influence of human rights norms by climate movements is a powerful normative tool but facing structural and political barriers that create a complex push and pull scenario.

5.2.1.1.5 Loss and Damage norms:

The establishment of the Loss and Damage Fund at COP27 represents the culmination of decades of sustained advocacy by civil society organisations, indigenous groups, youth activists, and other non-state actors, who have framed Loss and Damage as a critical issue of climate justice and more. For instance, notable pressure was exercised by youth activist movements like Fridays for Future, advocating for Loss and Damage and reparations (Gayle, 2022). These movements highlighted the tangible impacts of climate change as losses and damages—floods, droughts, and cultural loss—and elevating the moral imperative for action, permeating the norms to negotiations.²⁴⁷

At earlier COPs movements strategically engaged in workshops, dialogues, and side events, gradually transforming Loss and Damage from a marginal topic to a core issue. This is best expressed by a negotiator who works to push Loss and Damage in the multilateral negotiations, for last two decades:

So, very interestingly, I do recall also again, Saleemul Huq. When we established the Warsaw International Mechanism back in 2013, Saleem organised a workshop in Bellagio, Italy, and just before the COP, he invited all the negotiators for developing countries, also some experts [...] So these experts and the negotiators, we spent five

²⁴⁷ Interview with IP11

days in Bellagio to understand what the mechanism is [and] under that mechanism what would be the institutional structure. That academic exercise, you see, how academics are contributing to the process, how the CSOs are contributing to the process. Saleem, as part of CSO, supported [...] this workshop, and some of the experts [...] they worked with us five days and we drafted a skeleton about that international mechanism. Now after 12 years, I'm very happy to tell you, Susan, that we completed that skeleton. There is an international mechanism, there is a policy wing that is the Excom [Executive Committee of the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage], there is a technical wing that is the Santiago Network, and finally the loss and damage fund. (Interview with IP06)

While progress remains incomplete, liability and compensation are still off-limits, and funding levels fall far short of needs; the normative shift itself is a testament to the persistence of the wider climate movement.²⁴⁸ Beyond raising awareness, movements have shaped negotiation outcomes by providing argumentation, and specific proposals for textual references. For instance, the inclusion of direct access to the Loss and Damage Fund for vulnerable communities reflects a direct civil society organisation's proposal, accepted due to their compelling arguments and engagement with various stakeholders (states and non-state actors).²⁴⁹ Wealthy nations continue to resist language implying liability, underscoring the gap between movement-driven ambitions and parties' limited commitments.²⁵⁰ While movements have indelibly influenced the discourse and institutional framework, the substantive outcomes—adequate finance, swift implementation, and systemic reparations—still lag behind the justice they demand.²⁵¹

5.2.1.1.6 Global Earth Stewardship norms:

The role of climate movements have bolstered a multipronged approach where the focus on global earth stewardship norms often intersects with human rights norms (specifically, the right to a clean healthy and sustainable environment), climate justice, and more.²⁵² For instance, movements advocating for Global Earth Stewardship norms have emerged as significant actors in global climate negotiations, shifting approaches from purely emissions-focused frameworks to holistic strategies incorporating various intersecting concepts of ecosystem integrity. This transformation reflects a normative shift in climate governance that recognises the interconnection between biodiversity, traditional knowledge systems, nature-based solutions,

²⁴⁸ Interview with IP03

²⁴⁹ Interview with IP06

²⁵⁰ Interview with IP01, IP06

²⁵¹ Interview with IP03

²⁵² Interview with IP05, IP13, IP20

and climate action. Indigenous movements have been particularly instrumental in this evolution (Schroeder, 2010; Schroeder and Lovell, 2012)—secured the recognition of indigenous rights in Decision 1/CP.21 paragraph 135²⁵³, establishing a rights-based approach to climate action. This achievement was complemented by the establishment of the LCIPP at COP23, which institutionalised the integration of traditional ecological knowledge in climate policy (Ford *et al.*, 2016).

I think the LCIPP has actually been a very useful platform for addressing the engagement of local communities and indigenous peoples within the climate change process [...] since not much attention is given to the forum beyond the bigger movement outside. I can draw on the climate finance discussion in particular [...] in Glasgow where we were actually pushing to ensure that the indigenous knowledge would be included as a component of the knowledge base that can be used in climate financing decision. [...] There are two different levels of influence [...] from the outside in and one from the inside throughout the negotiating process. (Interview with IP11)

The interviewee highlights LCIPP's function as a critical institutional conduit, translating external momentum by climate movements and transnational advocacy networks for indigenous knowledge, into formal negotiation processes. Notably, this exemplifies how specialised forums serve as essential channels for the diffusion of global norms from climate movements into the technical architecture of climate UNFCCC negotiations, as evidenced by successful advocacy for indigenous knowledge incorporation in Glasgow's climate financing framework.

Climate movements and advocacy around forest preservation have similarly influenced climate governance structures through coalition-building. The Coalition for Rainforest Nations (CfRN) catalysed the development of REDD+,²⁵⁴ which mobilised significant climate finance for forest conservation (Gupta *et al.*, 2013).²⁵⁵ It is worth noting how CfRN, established in 2005 by Papua New Guinea and Costa Rica, strengthened civil society movements around it advocating for REDD+'s formal recognition in the 2007 Bali Action Plan and eventual incorporation into Article 5 of the 2015 Paris Agreement. REDD+ mobilising billions through the UN-REDD Programme, Forest Carbon Partnership Facility, and bilateral agreements. Ocean conservation movements have expanded the scope of Global Earth Stewardship norms influencing the

²⁵³ See also, Decision 1/CP.21 Paris Agreement preamble and Article 7.5

²⁵⁴ REDD+ stands for ‘Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation, and the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks in developing countries.’ (UNFCCC, no.)

²⁵⁵ See *Chapter 6: Norm Champions and Norm Antipreneurs*, to read how shifting governments influenced movements around Global Earth Stewardship norms.

climate negotiations to encompass marine ecosystems (Gallo, Levin and Victor, 2017). The Ocean Pathway Partnership, launched at COP23, created formal mechanisms for integrating ocean concerns into UNFCCC processes. Civil societies from SIDS have strategically leveraged ocean protection influencing the state parties in their negotiating positions, strengthening loss and damage provisions (Robinson, 2018). Agricultural and biodiversity movements have reshaped adaptation frameworks. For instance, *La Via Campesina* successfully advocated for agroecology language in adaptation frameworks (Pimbert, 2017; Sarku, Tauzie and Whitfield, 2023). Further, the Nature-Based Solutions Coalition has mainstreamed ecosystem approaches in climate policy, influencing over 130 countries to include NbS in their NDCs (Seddon *et al.*, 2020).

Further, an interviewee observed how the push by advocacy groups like Rainforest Alliance²⁵⁶ are also noted, pointing to how such groups liaise various stakeholders and use their platforms to highlight issues concerning nature and biodiversity.²⁵⁷ As such contributing to shifting the broader discussion toward stronger norms in global environmental stewardship.

Rights for nature and nature-based solutions in climate action is observed to be growing, helping the diffusion of Global Earth Stewardship norms.²⁵⁸ However, tensions between various movements and Party positions were marked by underlying political dynamics and disagreements.²⁵⁹ The framing of climate and environmental justice to support the diffusion of Global Earth Stewardship norms often relies on emotionally resonant rhetoric, invoking themes of historical responsibility, moral urgency, and reverence for nature. Such discourse foregrounds fairness, accountability, and ecological integrity, frequently expressed through powerful narratives, including portrayals of ‘earth’ or ‘nature’ as an unfairly treated ‘mother’-figure. Such rhetoric has helped to reframe environmental stewardship as not only a policy issue but also a matter of justice and ethics.

Environmental justice—you know, Mother Earth—we haven’t treated her fairly. And many of these things, I think, even back when I was in university in the ’80s, we had movements about them. They do have their origin in some of these campaigns and

²⁵⁶ The Rainforest Alliance is an international non-governmental organisation that works to conserve biodiversity and promote sustainable livelihoods. It achieves this by transforming land-use practices, business operations, and consumer behavior, notably through its certification programs which encourage sustainable agriculture, forestry, and tourism (Rainforest Alliance, 2025).

²⁵⁷ Interview with IP09

²⁵⁸ Interview with IP02, IP04

²⁵⁹ See *Chapter 6: Norm Champions and Norm Antipreneurs – Section: 6.3 Conflict Between the Norm Champions and Antipreneurs*

movements, and I think some of that even pressured governments to go to Rio and establish things like the UNFCCC. (Interview with IP09)

The diffusion of Global Earth Stewardship norms reflects a shift in climate discourse from technocratic governance to ethically framed environmentalism. The interviewee's reflection illustrates how long-standing activist narratives—rooted in emotional appeals and personified conceptions of nature—have historically shaped institutional developments like the UNFCCC. However, as these norms gain traction, they also surface deeper political tensions, particularly when normative framings rooted in justice and symbolism challenge state-centric, interest-driven positions. This underscores the normative contestation inherent in linking ecological protection with moral and cultural worldviews.

Movements have translated to many forms in the contemporary times. Coordinated efforts by negotiators—such as those involved in the Youth Negotiators Academy²⁶⁰—and various advocacy groups have been observed in strengthening the influence of social and climate movements across the three COPs of the Rio Conventions: the UNFCCC, the CBD (Convention on Biological Diversity), and the UNCCD (United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification). These efforts have helped to bolster cross-cutting normative agendas and foster greater coherence in environmental advocacy across multilateral processes.²⁶¹

5.2.1.1.7 Ecocide norms:

Climate movements have played a critical role in sustaining normative discourses of ecocide in the global environmental discourse, even though the concept is not directly on the UNFCCC agenda. Through side events, open letters, public campaigns, and protests, activists are increasingly normalising the idea of criminalising severe environmental destruction, making it harder for negotiators to dismiss it as fringe. Civil society conferences and parallel summits frequently highlight ecocide as a pressing topic, ensuring that decision-makers remain aware of its relevance, even if they do not actively engage with it in formal negotiations.²⁶²

NGOs and specialised campaigns, such as Stop Ecocide International—which was started by late Polly Higgins and now spearheaded by Jojo Mehta—have been significant contributors to ecocide advocacy. These organisations, often supported by the broader climate movement ecosystem, actively engage at COPs, hosting briefings and building coalitions with other

²⁶⁰ See *Chapter 5: Influence of Global Norms on Negotiations and Agreements – Section 5.2.1.2.2 Coalition Building Across the Blue-Green Zone(s)*

²⁶¹ Interview with IP13

²⁶² Interview with IP12, IP20

environmental groups. Youth movements, in particular, bolster ecocide conversations, ensuring that the concept is consistently represented at international forums. For instance, Greta Thunberg donated a considerable amount of some prize money she got to Stop Ecocide International (Win, 2020). The collaboration between youth climate activists and dedicated ecocide results in shared messaging strategies that amplify the cause.²⁶³

The integration of ecocide norms into UNFCCC negotiations faces several significant obstacles. First, ecocide has not yet been formally referenced within UNFCCC texts, relegating discussions to side events and parallel forums without a clear entry point into decision-making processes.²⁶⁴ Second, states and corporations resist ecocide due to fears of liability and accountability, as criminalising environmental harm could introduce legal consequences many actors wish to avoid. Hence, while ecocide can contribute to broader accountability discourse, it does not currently offer concrete or actionable mechanisms for holding states and corporations accountable within climate negotiations:

Ecocide can be a part of enhanced accountability, but it doesn't fix the fact that we need to transform and reshape our economies and tax the heck out of carbon, and eventually stop using it altogether—by 2030 or 2027. So, pretty imminently stop using it altogether, and then figure out a way to make the wealthy pay for it. That's the sort of accountability we need. (Interview with IP03)

Third, the complexity of proving causation and intent (*mens rea*) in a global context of diffuse emissions and interconnected supply chains further complicates its implementation and enforcement at least in the context of climate change, discouraging state support.²⁶⁵ Additionally, the consensus-driven nature of the UNFCCC negotiations deters the introduction of potentially divisive or punitive norms like ecocide, as states seek to maintain delicate diplomatic balances.²⁶⁶ There is also a fear of setting a precedent, with states concerned that adopting ecocide could pave the way for broader criminalisation of environmental issues, limiting their sovereignty and economic choices. Finally, the lack of strong demand within negotiation rooms, diminishes its traction in formal processes, despite strong civil society support.²⁶⁷

²⁶³ Interview with IP15

²⁶⁴ Interview with IP09

²⁶⁵ Interview with IP17

²⁶⁶ Interview with IP12

²⁶⁷ Interview with IP20

5.2.1.1.8 *Sufficiency*:

The integration of sufficiency into mainstream climate policy remains contested.²⁶⁸ An interviewee underscores that while movements champion sufficiency as part of a broader critique of economic system, “it doesn't always end up in the final version of our decisions and our texts”.²⁶⁹ However, it is observed how sufficiency aligns with other norms; hence, the role of movements is multifaceted i.e., the diffusion of any norms that clusters with the principle of sufficiency bolsters the resilience of the idea.

An interviewee emphasised:

In terms of [...] broader questions like sufficiency, there is space within the climate regime to bring forward these ideas. However, success depends on party adherence. Without governments on your side, these ideas may resonate in the hallways but have little impact within the negotiation process. Efforts need to focus on national levels to change mindsets. (Interview with IP05)

This foregrounds how necessary change must be systemic, particularly reforming the fossil fuel-based economy. While sufficiency may manifest subtly at the individual level (e.g. choosing low-carbon transport, smaller homes, or less meat), its deeper concern is how institutions, policies, and economic incentives expose the need to stay within planetary boundaries (see Darby, 2007; Jungell-Michelsson and Heikkurinen, 2022; Saheb, 2022). This is particularly pertinent given an interviewee's observation that the fossil fuel-based economy strategically redirects focus to individual behaviours as a means of deflecting attention from its own systemic practices—an approach that climate movements must critically resist.²⁷⁰

There is evidence that a small, affluent minority is responsible for a disproportionate share of global emissions; hence, transformative efforts should target these high emitters.²⁷¹ Sufficiency is thus closely linked to distributive justice: it argues for “enoughness” for everyone (Hartmann, 2024) It critiques systems where overconsumption by the wealthy is normalised while others lack basic needs—through a systemic focus. Here, sufficiency critiques growth-driven economic models, advocating for meeting everyone's basic needs within ecological limits. It prioritises well-being and equity over accumulation or excess. The principled idea of sufficiency operates at both territorial and extraterritorial levels. In its

²⁶⁸ See Chapter 1: Introduction to read the definition of ‘principled idea’ and how it is distinguished from a norm. Also see *Chapter 4: Global Norms and International Climate Negotiations* to read how sufficiency is being referenced in UNFCCC COPs (COP24-28).

²⁶⁹ Interview with IP09

²⁷⁰ Interview with IP05

²⁷¹ Interview with IP05

territorial application, climate movements invoke sufficiency to demand systemic domestic transformations aligned with equity and accountability. Extraterritorially, the principle calls for equity across agenda items such as climate finance, mitigation, means of implementation, loss and damage, and adaptation.

An activist turned negotiator, observes how she incorporates these two sides to the call for sufficiency:

We engage in all of this [activism, campaigning, and negotiations] because we believe that policy is essential to guiding society toward a future that aligns with planetary boundaries and addresses the crises we are currently facing. What we need are better policies—ones that genuinely reflect realities on the ground and advocate for a liveable and desirable future for the planet. (Interview with IP13)

This quote illustrates how sufficiency, though not named explicitly, is embedded in the activist-negotiator's normative orientation. Her emphasis on aligning policy with planetary boundaries, addressing systemic crises, and pursuing a liveable and desirable future reflects the moral grounding of the sufficiency principle—prioritising ecological limits, human well-being, and long-term sustainability over, growth-centric paradigms. By linking grassroots realities with formal policymaking, she bridges the gap between bottom-up moral imperatives and top-down institutional processes. This dual positioning—of activism and negotiation—demonstrates how sufficiency can be advanced through both normative discourse and strategic engagement, especially when framed within broader justice-oriented frameworks.

In sum, while climate movements champion sufficiency as a systemic critique of overconsumption and growth-centric models, its diffusion depends on both strategic framing by acknowledging its intersectionality—reinforced through related norms such as climate justice, global earth stewardship, human rights, loss and damage. Specific cases of normative overlap—such as between sufficiency and biodiversity—demonstrate growing support for advocacy across multifaceted issue areas (see [Hachtmann, 2024](#)). Activists operating within and beyond negotiation spaces illustrate how sufficiency can be advanced through both moral discourse and institutional engagement, particularly when linked to structural reform and distributive justice.

5.2.1.2 Tactics and Strategies: Strengthening Influences

Here, the section divides into three. In the first two sub-sections, I examine how climate movements amplify their normative influence within UNFCCC negotiations through two interlinked tactics and strategies. (i) framings: where moral vocabularies like equity, justice,

solidarity, duty of care structure attention and recast agenda language in UNFCCC forums [*Section 5.2.1.2.1*]. (ii) coalition-building and political campaigning across cross-constituencies, Blue-Green Zone(s), and digital/media platforms [*Section 5.2.1.2.2*]. And finally, (iii) I explore the barriers to influence where I analyse how climate movements primarily face four key barriers to influencing UNFCCC negotiations: definitional ambiguities, political co-option, funding dependencies, and the dilution of normative content [*Section 5.2.1.2.3*]. These constraints limit the institutional uptake of movement-driven norms while simultaneously creating spaces for norm contestation and adaptive strategies.

5.2.1.2.1 Framings

Climate movements, as norm entrepreneurs, play a key role in the initial phase of norm diffusion by bringing attention to specific issues through their careful use of language and narratives. They employ strategic framing techniques to name, interpret, and add dramatic elements to bolster their advocacy and persuasion. Importantly, norm entrepreneurs use such frames throughout both the argumentation and norm-change stages.²⁷² The process of framing/re-framing is what scholars in social movement theory specifically identify as that which gives “significance to events and experiences, helping to structure perception and inform actions at both personal and collective levels” (Snow *et al.*, 1986, p. 464; Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998, p. 897). Empirical research on moral foundations, motivations, and framing shows that viewing climate change as a moral issue increases concern. Public discourse in many regions also frames the benefits and drawbacks of climate policies in moral terms (see Grasso and Markowitz, 2015; Adger, Butler and Walker-Springett, 2017; Lau *et al.*, 2021).

Climate movements deploy a range of moral principles, including equity, justice, solidarity, and the duty of care—to frame issues, advocate for normative change, and exert moral power within international climate negotiations.²⁷³ They often intersect and combine rather than being rehearsed as stand-alone framings.

For instance, climate movements have pushed negotiators to give greater prominence to the shift away from fossil fuels on the agenda, even though the outcome was only a call for a global phase-down and “transitioning away” from fossil fuels, rather than a complete phase-out (Morton *et al.*, 2023)—thus, increasing the moral currency to the language. Movements,

²⁷² See *Chapter 3 – Review of Theory*

²⁷³ See *Chapter 1 Introduction* to read more about the centrality of these moral principles as normative frames used by climate movements.

especially youth and climate justice groups, frequently label fossil fuels as ‘morally wrong,’ underscoring harm to children, future generations, and frontline communities. This framing strategy positions the demand to transition away from fossil fuels as a moral imperative, thereby pressuring negotiators to acknowledge and eventually address the issue. For instance, a negotiator from a Small Island Developing State noted:

And so, it becomes not just a scientific argument for phasing out fossil fuels, but also a moral one, because by continuing to burn fossil fuels, we create moral implications for future generations and young children. It also impacts vulnerable states, given that fossil fuels drive climate change and affect them significantly. (Interview with IP11)

Further, framings that conveyed a moral argument for climate action, often advanced some specific narratives. That is, intergenerational norms explicitly carried the framing of “urgency” and “survival”. This has been emphasised by a UN official:

Vanessa Nakate and Greta Thunberg and youth climate activists in general have had a huge impact on the general public conversations about the climate crisis, bringing the public’s awareness of the intensity and urgency of the climate crisis to unprecedented levels. [...] Further, the most compelling normative arguments are made in the context of the COP: the fact [for example] that [some states’] survival depends on urgent and ambitious climate action. (Interview with IP05)

Here, justice-based frames tie climate inaction to existential threats for vulnerable communities and future generations. Such vulnerability is often framed together—emphasising hurt or emotion:

The champions for loss and damage have very much come from [...] what we want to call the ‘little people or little countries’ basically saying, ‘Look, I’m hurting. We’re here. This is what’s happening to us.’ (Interview with IP01)

Moreover, the quote highlights an unequal distribution of climate impacts and vulnerabilities, where those least responsible for the crisis (“little people or little countries”) face the gravest consequences, where the frame of equity coincides with justice. Equity in climate governance refers to the fair distribution of burdens and benefits of climate action, taking into account historical responsibility, present capability, and differential vulnerability. The UNFCCC primarily embeds the equity principle through the notion of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities (CBDR-RC). Movements often invoke equity to critique disproportionate burdens placed on vulnerable communities and to argue for greater commitments from historically high-emitting states. The principle of equity is embodied in the normative content/meaning of climate justice—encompassing distributional, procedural and

recognitional justice (IPCC, 2022a; Madénian, 2025).²⁷⁴ Literature shows that these three dimensions of justice shape equity—for fair outcomes, inclusive/participatory processes, and acknowledging/addressing existing inequalities (see Mohtat and Khirfan, 2021; Madénian, 2025).

One of the main frames of equity that is seen to take traction in influencing climate negotiations is with respect to intergenerational equity norms. Regarding the influence of its frame by climate movements, an interviewee emphasised:

Intergenerational equity, of course, is very appealing conceptually, morally, as a slogan. We have to preserve the earth for future generations. Who can disagree with that? Our children, our grandchildren. (Interview with IP17)

Another interviewee drawing from his experience as a negotiator and observer in the UNFCCC negotiations since 1992 explained:

There is always been a certain moral authority to those from the most vulnerable countries. [Also], the fact that there is a strong civil society movement bringing together youth, indigenous people, other civil society groups, strengthening those messages and stressing the same messages has been important because it is been reinforcing, to some degree, the influence of those [countries]. (Interview with IP16)

Despite growing visibility and strategic engagement within the UNFCCC process, a negotiator during the interview reflected on the limited institutional uptake of normative frames advanced by youth climate movements:

Actually, we are still not, let's say, witnessing those kinds of terms present in the negotiation text. Even like on every COP we may have, let's say one article or two articles of the summarising document [...] stating that we should have better representation of youth... but... in the official... [...] there is no mentioning for such a thing. [...] Maybe only... in the Action for Climate Empowerment (ACE) or the Gender Agenda; But for all the other important agenda like finance, like adaptation, mitigation... that is missing (Interview with IP15)

This testimony highlights the disconnect between the normative framings mobilised by youth—particularly principles like intergenerational equity and duty of care—and their integration into the core negotiation agendas. This suggests that while youth actors may exercise moral power through discursive and coalition-building strategies, their influence is constrained by both structural barriers to participation and the technocratic framing of key agenda items. The finding underscores the asymmetry between movement-generated norms

²⁷⁴ See *Chapter 4: Global Norms and International Climate Negotiations - Section 4.3.2 Climate Justice Norms*

and their institutional internalisation within multilateral climate negotiations. Further, with regard to implementation to real policy solutions, a negotiator explained:

[T]he youth movements in general have been very effective at denouncing: 'Shame on you.' [...] in terms of narrative, in terms of branding [these] have been very effective. But when it comes to the shift towards solution, [it is] something that they haven't been able to do as effectively. People grow tired of [...] this movement. (Interview with IP02)

The interviewee explains this through three points. First, shifting political landscapes in Europe and North America have created environments less receptive to climate activism, with public officials adjusting their commitments based on electoral considerations. Second, the movements' branding (i.e., the popular framings) has stagnated—remaining effective at criticism but failing to evolve toward proposing solutions, leading to fatigue in public consciousness. Third, these movements have struggled to achieve true global representation despite some participation from the Global South. The third point recentres the need to strengthen the equity framing in climate movements, with plausible political changes. This analysis reveals the complex interplay between political pragmatism, movements, and the realities of global power dynamics that constrain climate activism.²⁷⁵ The interviewee even critiques how 'youth' activists are now 'adults', which has diminished some of the movements' initial persuasive power.²⁷⁶ This suggests that effective climate movements must adapt their strategies beyond moral condemnation to include practical solutions while meaningfully incorporating diverse global perspectives. However, this is counter-argued in *Section 5.2.1.3*, which presents evidence that intergenerational voices within climate movements exert pressure to employ diverse tools to ground their advocacy in practice—beyond mere rhetoric—by effecting normative shifts in political will e.g., through litigation and media.

Equity is a site for norm contestation—thus, gravitating the frame for the moral principle of solidarity. Equitable solutions require addressing the historic disparity between high-emitting (often wealthier) states i.e., developed countries (or as expressed in the phrase, "Global North") and those most vulnerable to climate change i.e., often the developing countries (or as expressed in the phrase, "Global South").²⁷⁷ Here, the binary—of Global North and South/ or developed and developing countries—is prominent in academic literature, for analytical comprehension of common socio-economic patterns (see Atapattu and Gonzalez, 2015;

²⁷⁵ Interview with IP02

²⁷⁶ Interview with IP02

²⁷⁷ Interview with IP02

Natarajan, 2021; Singh, 2023). A few interviewees resonated the sentiment expressing that climate policies must not be a privilege for the few, nor climate politics dictated by wealthy states, and responsibility should be shared equitably.²⁷⁸ However, the world offers a far more complex picture; hence, in this context, understanding the position of countries like India, China, and Brazil requires nuance; while they occupy a more 'developed' status compared to other 'developing countries'—with respect to questions on climate accountability, there are unique challenges that cannot be overlooked. These emerging economies face increasing political pressure for progressive climate action, yet their development needs remain significant, considering the vast population and inequalities within their states. This presents a delicate balance where ambitious climate action becomes both a practical necessity and an ethical imperative (see Voigt and Ferreira, 2016; Ann Samuel, 2024). Nevertheless, the question of historic emissions introduces a crucial differentiation (Roberts and Parks, 2009). Despite their recent advances in terms of economic growth and development, these countries confront the reality of disproportionate atmospheric carbon burden accumulated through centuries of industrialisation by colonial powers, creating persistent transnational inequalities. Agarwal and Narain, (2019, p. 81) articulate this as "environmental colonialism," emphasising how these historical asymmetries generate extraterritorial obligations from former colonial nations.

Climate movements increasingly frame their advocacy through equity precisely to address these historical imbalances. This approach represents a neo-decolonial strategy that connects intergenerational equity with transnational solidarity, strengthening the normative foundations of global climate governance. Solidarity is the unity of individuals bound by shared values or interests, characterised by mutual care, respect, trust, collective pride, and a shared sense of responsibility for the group's successes and failures (Cureton, 2012; Bazzani, 2024). By emphasising both historical responsibility and current capability, this framing embodying equity, solidarity and justice transcends mere economic categorisation to address the structural injustices embedded in contemporary climate governance regimes—calling for a more nuanced distribution of responsibilities both within and among states. Faith-based transnational networks have played a part in bolstering the climate movements and the resonance of their framings by advocating for solidarity.

²⁷⁸ Interview with IP01, IP11, IP13, IP14

The role that religious leaders play in leveraging moral and spiritual authority to address climate change is key, since faith-based organisations and their advocacy through climate movements and TANs create a unique intersection of activism in faith networks (see Tutu, 2014; Freedman, 2015; Glaab, 2017; Horowitz and Povoledo, 2023; Brown, 2025). Particularly for climate justice norms, religious leaders have emerged as influential norm champions within UNFCCC negotiations; Former UNFCCC Executive Secretary Christina Figueres explicitly framed the role of religious institutions and leaders as a “to set the moral compass” on climate change and to act on it (Figueres, 2014). Such interventions and mobilisation by climate movements and transnational advocacy networks:

[they] keeps governments on their toes; since [Civil society has] a big role in building that moral case. (Interview with IP03)

Here, the interviewee observed how climate change is not just about greenhouse gases but about equity, dignity, and survival. As such, moral principle of solidarity and equity holds the parties together for accountability.

In sum, climate movements, as norm entrepreneurs, strategically employ the interlinked moral principles of equity, justice, solidarity, and duty of care to shape discourse, influence agendas, and pressure decision-makers within international climate negotiations. Through these principles climate movements not only frame climate change as an moral imperative but also serve as tools for contesting entrenched power asymmetries, from intergenerational responsibility to historic inequities between the Global North and South. By mobilising diverse actors these framings transcend technical policy debates, rooting climate governance in moral accountability and collective responsibility.

5.2.1.2.2 Coalition Building and Political Campaigning:

Climate movements have built broad coalitions around the negotiations, linking various climate movements, NGOs, and think tanks (see Rietig, 2016; Hess, 2018). Here I observe three distinct patterns of coalitions building and political campaign—firstly, how constituencies and cross-constituency influence is built. Secondly, how coalitions strategies across the Blue-Green Zone(s) at COPs, and finally, the influence of digital platforms.

5.2.1.2.2.1 Constituencies and Cross Constituency Influence

Before analysing coalition building across constituencies, a premise on what the constituencies are in the UNFCCC, warrants attention. The UNFCCC COP are complex negotiation space, where constant collision of global norms is strategically manoeuvred to enhance influence. To

aid this, the institutional structure in itself strengthens the receptivity of the advocacy of climate movements in the negotiations. That said, in the UNFCCC process admitted non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have composed themselves into groups with diverse but broadly related interests or perspectives, called constituencies. There are nine constituencies in the UNFCCC, and it is worth noting how global norms through them influence the negotiations. The constituencies are: Business and industry NGOs (BINGO), Environmental NGOs (ENGO), Farmers, Indigenous peoples' organisations (IPO), Local government and municipal authorities (LGMA), Research and independent NGOs (RINGO), Trade Union NGOs (TUNGO), Women and Gender (WGC), and Youth NGOs (YOUNGO) (UNFCCC, no date).

Constituencies are representation of various transnational advocacy networks that have formal recognition not just to be an observant in the negotiations, but to intervene during the process. The institutional structure, therefore, is observed to foster channels where active engagement with the negotiations are the resonance of a greater momentum by climate movements, academics, intergovernmental-organisation, public discourse and more. As of April 2025, the official UNFCCC website records 3,724 NGOs who have observer status in COPs and are part of one of these constituencies. The number of countries represented through these NGOs are 132 (UNFCCC, no date).

Each NGO is affiliated with a constituency, and it is recorded that Environmental NGOs (ENGO) have 756 NGOs (including Climate Action Network and Climate Justice Now)²⁷⁹; Research and independent NGOs (RINGO) have 589 NGOs registered; Business and industry NGOs (BINGO) have 249 NGOs; Youth NGOs (YOUNGO) have 108 NGOs; among Farmers and Indigenous peoples organisations (IPO), farmers have 45 recorded NGOs and Indigenous Peoples have 66 NGOs; Local Government and Municipal Authorities (LGMA) record 41 NGOs; Women and Gender (WGC) record 59 NGOs, and Trade Union NGOs (TUNGO) record 14 NGOs. There are 16 NGOs that does not record any specific constituency.

However, it is important to observe how the representation and structure of constituency groups within UNFCCC negotiations is significant to the question of how global norms influence climate negotiations, for four specific reasons. First, the constituencies provides formal channels for diverse global norms to enter official negotiations. As scholars like Keck and

²⁷⁹ The UNFCCC website records them separately within the ENGO, since CAN and CJN are probably umbrella networks that represent multiple individual NGOs. Many environmental organisations choose to coordinate their advocacy efforts through these networks to increase their collective influence at climate negotiations (UNFCCC, no date).

Sikkink, (1998) have demonstrated in their work on transnational advocacy networks, non-state actors serve as crucial norm entrepreneurs who can introduce, amplify, and legitimise particular normative frameworks within international institutions. The disproportionate representation of certain constituencies (ENGOs having 756 organisations versus TUNGO's 14) reflects power imbalances in whose norms receive greater attention and legitimacy in the negotiation process. Second, the presence of umbrella networks as ultimate access points for climate movements is noteworthy—they are sites that facilitate organic coalition-building. The special mention of CAN and CJN within the ENGO constituency highlights how umbrella networks function as access points. The climate movements and their channelling through specific networks and constituencies does not just aggregate individual NGO voices but actively shape collective positions through internal deliberation processes that determine which normative frameworks become dominant (see Schroeder and Lovell, 2012; Hadden, 2015; Thew, Middlemiss and Paavola, 2020). The way these NGOs utilise side-events and active bargaining power on corridors are noteworthy (Schroeder and Lovell, 2012; Xie *et al.*, 2025).

Third, the formal recognition of these nine constituencies records the diplomacy of NGOs where they actively institutionalise certain types of influence while potentially marginalising others for diffusion of global norms (Betsill and Corell, 2007). The constituency structure itself reflects underlying normative assumptions about which societal sectors deserve formalised representation. Stevenson and Dryzek, (2014) observe the complications in the UNFCCC's institutional design which creates and legitimises certain normative frameworks while potentially sidelining others, through deliberate transmission of global norms. That is, they explain how some there are deliberative systems where the public space (where, NGOs businesses, scientists, academics, activists, and journalists try to get the attention) must be separate from yet connected to empowered decision spaces (i.e., the negotiators, presidency, and UN officials in the UNFCCC COP space) (Stevenson and Dryzek, 2014). They further observe how constructivist scholars of international relations point to different studies of normative change that have were achieved through the slow but persistent struggles of civil society and climate movements (Stevenson and Dryzek, 2014). The fact that indigenous peoples have their own constituency (IPO) reflects the growing normative recognition of indigenous rights in environmental governance.

Finally, this constituency structure matters because it shapes whose knowledge counts and whose interests are represented in the negotiations—thereby influencing outcomes. As Newell, (2000) has shown, differential access to institutions reproduces power asymmetries in global

environmental politics. The numerical dominance of NGOs and RINGOs suggests that scientific and environmental norms may have greater institutional access than economic justice or labour perspectives (represented by the smaller TUNGO constituency). This imbalance influences which normative frameworks ultimately shape negotiation outcomes. However, beyond numbers of NGOs within the constituencies, there is reason to believe how the constituencies have a collectively power in being vocal inside the negotiations.

That said, cross-constituency coalition building is politically strategic—since it compounds moral weight for any normative frame(s) which climate movements use. Broad alliances that form strategic coalitions—that is by labour unions, youth, women’s groups, environmental NGOs)—influence specific language, e.g., on human rights or fossil fuel references. An example is noted by a negotiator:

During the negotiations of the Paris Agreement, a cross-constituency group collectively advocated for the integration of human rights in the Paris Agreement. [...] We’re talking about every major constituency—trade unions, youth, women and gender, environmental NGOs—coalesced around and made that a priority (Interview with IP01).²⁸⁰

Here, it is observed in practice, the dynamics described by Hadden, (2015) regarding overlapping membership and coalition-building in environmental movements. In this example, during the Paris Agreement negotiations, individuals and organisations from different formal UNFCCC constituencies—such as trade unions, youth, women and gender groups, and environmental NGOs—formed a cross-constituency group. Many of these actors likely had shared members who participated in more than one coalition or maintained relationships across them. These individuals acted as bridges, enabling the exchange of information and alignment of advocacy priorities. By coalescing around a single, clearly defined priority—integrating human rights language into the Paris Agreement—the group was able to pool resources, amplify its message, and exert collective influence on the negotiations. This example shows how intentional coalition-making and cross-membership can translate theoretical network advantages into concrete negotiation strategies, enhancing the visibility and legitimacy of certain norms—in this case, human rights—in the climate regime. In the same vein, a campaigner in the negotiation space(s), emphasised how mostly, coalitions are “deliberately made”²⁸¹—i.e., where the intentionality of the coalition-forming is underlined. Activists from

²⁸⁰ See *Chapter 5 – Section 5.2.2.1 UNFCCC Constituencies* where the formal constituencies and their role are discussed.

²⁸¹ Interview with IP12

diverse backgrounds often stress common vulnerabilities and strategies for survival, both of which are bolstered through youth movements.²⁸²

5.2.1.2.2.2 Coalition Building Across the Blue-Green Zone(s)

As for campaigning tactics, it works across the COP blue and green zones.²⁸³ In the UNFCCC COPs, the Blue Zone is the official space managed by the United Nations (UN)—for accredited government delegates, UN bodies, observer organisations, and approved media, where formal negotiations, high-level events, and closed-door discussions take place. By contrast, the Green Zone is a public-facing area usually managed by the host country, open to a wider audience—such as civil society, businesses, youth activists, and the general public—and featuring exhibitions, side events, cultural displays, and networking opportunities aimed at raising awareness of climate issues.

Political campaigning outside the negotiation space (i.e., usually in the Green Zone or even beyond) is strategised with protests and marches which draw media attention, applying indirect pressure on negotiators. There is activism that combines advocacy both inside and outside the negotiation rooms/halls; this was noted by an interviewee who is a negotiator and who was a youth climate activist:

That is why I am also doing activism outside the space [...] it can be frustrating if you're just inside working on the nitty gritty language. But it can also be frustrating if you're always outside banging your head [...] I think the combination is really powerful. (Interview with IP13)

In sum, non-state actors employ a dual approach that integrates advocacy within formal negotiation spaces and public-facing activism outside them. This blending of insider participation with outsider mobilisation enables them to influence both the technical language of agreements and the broader political discourse, as negotiations unfold. As one negotiator-activist observed, the combination mitigates the limitations of working exclusively inside or outside the process, suggesting that strategic interplay between these arenas amplifies the overall impact of climate advocacy.²⁸⁴

A unique example of coalition building is seen in training initiatives like the Climate Youth Negotiator Program (Youth Negotiators Academy, 2024)—which directly link climate

²⁸² Interview with IP01, IP08, IP12, IP13, IP20

²⁸³ See *Chapter 4: Global Norms and International Climate Negotiations – Section 4.1 Broader Normativity*

²⁸⁴ See *Chapter 5: Influence of Global Norms on Negotiations and Agreements – Section 5.2.1.2 Tactics and Strategies: Strengthening Influences*

movements outside the UNFCCC COP space with the inside of the UNFCCC COP negotiation rooms. The CYNP (in 2023) has trained 175 young participants to advocate for intergenerational justice directly and/or indirectly within negotiations, marking a shift from passive observation to active agenda-setting.²⁸⁵ The CYNP, which is the Youth Negotiators Academy's first programme,²⁸⁶ focuses on capacity building of young climate negotiators by providing training, connections, and empowerment, ensuring young negotiators can actively and effectively engage in UNFCCC negotiations. The Youth Negotiators Academy is co-founded by four young women climate activists Marie-Claire Graf, Veena Balakrishnan, Sophie Daud, and Heeta Lakhani; with Future Leaders Network as one of its founding partners. The co-founder Marie-Claire Graf has been a Fridays for Future climate activist in Switzerland and became a member of the federal Swiss delegation to the UNFCCC COP25 in Madrid—the youngest delegate, negotiator, and expert on Action for Climate Empowerment. This is a clear trajectory of norm entrepreneurship of climate movements reaching the negotiation rooms.

Youth negotiators bring fresh perspectives and a generational urgency to negotiations, championing long-term climate goals, enhanced finance, and adaptation measures to protect future generations. Their presence shifts the narrative from viewing intergenerational equity and justice as a moral background issue to a core principle shaping operative texts, finance mechanisms, and technology transfers.²⁸⁷ Unlike more entrenched negotiators, youth negotiators often push for transformative solutions, challenging status quo approaches and reframing climate policy as a long-term responsibility. Their ability to speak directly in negotiations ensures that youth-centric concerns were not easily dismissed, embedding intergenerational equity more deeply into climate governance processes.²⁸⁸

Further, the negotiators thrive on relationships, and coalitions-building—bolstering the human agency:

Relationships are everything in negotiations. [...] It is about having relationships with people. [...] It is not just about what is been discussed in the room. You know, it is being able to discuss it—at the cafe outside and be able to come back to the room and then those things can be implemented. [Things like] maybe it is stronger if you know another country says this opinion than for us to say that opinion; so how can we like push our agenda forward too while working with other countries? [Thus] negotiator

²⁸⁵ Interview with IP20

²⁸⁶ YNA currently now have training initiatives for young negotiators at Convention of Biodiversity (CBD) and UN Convention on Combating Desertification (UNCCD) COPs (see, Youth Negotiators Academy, 2024)

²⁸⁷ Interview with IP08

²⁸⁸ Interview with IP20

network can only be strengthened even more having those relationships built. That is why I think it is so important for more young people to be involved in the negotiations. [...] Young people are invited in a more activist capacity and I think we need a lot more of us to be involved in the negotiating space as experts, as young people, because then you're already coming to the table with [...] the ideas of intergenerational justice, [often] including indigenous wisdom, and so forth. (Interview with IP08)

Their advocacy, is grounded in science and attuned to public discourse for generating political will; a young negotiator observes:

It is a global crisis. And we can only respond [...] when you want to apply a justice lens, [if not] we literally just wipe [out] half the countries because they just don't have the means because of the inequalities [in terms of] the source, and then the impact of the emissions and other issues. So, that is why we also [engage] young people in the official processes, the negotiation process [...] that we also reinstate trust in the process. We're actually making these voices heard and ensuring that there is more diverse representation. We continue to train negotiators [in] the UNFCCC space, but also others. [As I] mentioned to you, we also train young people in the UNCCD space [on desertification], because ultimately all the climate [issues are interconnected when it comes to] engineering solutions out. (Interview with IP13)

The interviewed co-founders of the Youth Negotiator's Academy stressed that the UNFCCC negotiations risk losing legitimacy as countries fragment and settle for minimal agreements, with some even threatening to leave.²⁸⁹ This has been noted with the United States leaving the Paris Agreement for the second time—first in 2019, and in 2025 (Kerschner, Pullins and Knijnenburg, 2025). In this challenging context, youth negotiators are seen as a vital force to reinvigorate ambition and public trust. She stressed how by training and involving more young people—not just in the UNFCCC but also in related processes like desertification and biodiversity negotiations—the academy is hoping to ensure greater representation of youth across the globe, challenge entrenched power dynamics and inequalities within the multilateral environmental negotiations, and remind governments of who they truly represent.²⁹⁰ Despite frustration with the slow pace and limited accountability of the system, the interviewee²⁹¹ believes that global cooperation remains essential, especially with the justice lens that youth can bring to the table.

Another negotiator trained by the CYNP, emphasised how he envisions advocating for their country, particularly within Africa, while promoting stronger youth representation.²⁹² The

²⁸⁹ Interview with IP13

²⁹⁰ Interview with IP13

²⁹¹ Interview with IP13

²⁹² Interview with IP15

interviewee highlighted however how the label “young negotiator” can undermine credibility, especially when dealing with high-level officials; this he noted was but a subjective observation—contingent to people and culture.²⁹³ Although more young faces are appearing in international forums, significant obstacles remain—such as funding for travel(s), bureaucratic barriers (e.g. visas, border security, etc), and limited capacity-building.²⁹⁴ Negotiators from wealthier countries are better financially compensated and an interviewee²⁹⁵ spoke how they receive year-round support. To address this imbalance, creating sustainable programs in the Global South, allowing youth negotiators to build coalitions, refine positions, and meaningfully engage, remains important.²⁹⁶ In interviews with negotiators who are affiliated with the Youth Negotiators Academy, I learned how they train new negotiators for the UNFCCC process, aiming to overcome financial and procedural hurdles, and ultimately ensure that young people’s voices are heard both during and after negotiations.²⁹⁷

5.2.1.2.2.3 Influence of Media and Digital Platforms

Although debates about the impact of media are present, there is broad consensus that it is essential for effective mobilisation, coalition building, collective action, and widespread information dissemination (see Anderson, 2017; Elliott and Earl, 2018; Chon and Park, 2020; Chen *et al.*, 2023). Youth climate activist groups have formed transnational networks, coordinating both domestic political campaigning, lobbying and global advocacy, thereby amplifying their moral message in multiple arenas:

Whereas during the COPs, they get disconnected from this kind of grassroot activism, and they engage in multilateral spaces. They connect with other youth from other parts of the world, and they push for normative developments that are global in nature, whereas outside the COP itself, they are trying to, in their own national countries, make sure that their countries remain exemplary. [...] The youth movement has been in the last few years, I think up until COP 26, it was more in COPs that they were very effective. [...] They've been strategically leveraging roles. (Interview with IP02)

Here, the interview’s mention of youth climate movements’ function can be traced to their role as transnational norm entrepreneurs through a strategic dual approach. By connecting globally at COPs while maintaining national activism, they employ what Keck and Sikkink, (1998) call the ‘boomerang pattern’—using international platforms to generate pressure that rebounds onto

²⁹³ Interview with IP15

²⁹⁴ Interview with IP01, IP13

²⁹⁵ Interview with IP15

²⁹⁶ Interview with IP15

²⁹⁷ Interview with IP15

national governments. Nevertheless, advocacy aimed at influencing state actors reflects a shift from the classic ‘boomerang’ pattern to a ‘transcaler’ pattern. The transcaler approach describes NGOs’ strategic engagement across multiple levels of governance—local, national, regional, and global—at the same time, rather than limiting their work to transnational activity that moves horizontally across borders. By operating simultaneously at these different scales, NGOs can link local experiences to global negotiations, apply pressure at multiple points, and enhance the effectiveness of their advocacy. (Baraldi, 2024, p. 16). This also reflects contemporary advances in information technology, which create new pathways for global norm diffusion and reshape how negotiators and consultants continuously accumulate knowledge, thereby transforming strategic approaches to normative influence (see Christiano, 2022; Eidenmueller, 2024; Shen and Jin, 2024). Digital information flows, in particular, establish novel patterns of norm transmission that operate beyond traditional diplomatic channels. For example, youth networks such as Fridays for Future and YOUNGO have coordinated social media campaigns and utilising digital platforms to share negotiation updates in real time with activists and allies across the world (see Anderson, 2017; Hayes and O’Neill, 2021; Mede and Schroeder, 2024). This sophisticated engagement with global normative processes—combining straggles around both inside- and outside-the- COP space—has enabled youth activists to exert significant influence on the normative shift of intergenerational justice.

5.2.1.2.3 Barriers to Influence

This section examines the barriers to the influence of global norms and climate movements in international negotiations. Here, I observe four barriers. These barriers arise from definitional ambiguities, political co-option, funding dependencies, and the dilution of normative content—demonstrating not only how powerful normative frameworks can be undermined by competing interests, structural constraints, and tactical limitations, but also how such barriers can facilitate norm contestation that, in turn, may refine the tactics and strategies of climate movements and transnational advocacy networks.

A key barrier arises from the lack of a shared definition of terms like “climate justice.” As one interviewee explains:

Disparity in the meaning of 'climate justice' - in that way, the differences of perception even amidst youth movements, matter. (Interview with IP02)

When “climate justice” means different things to different actors, i.e., whether referring to international equity, intergenerational concerns, or national redistribution, it creates a

fragmentation in the normative discourse. In effect, multiple definitions lead to contestation between different norm clusters. Although contestation may evoke resiliency—I consider it as a barrier, since clarity over terminologies can posit legal challenges. Negotiations are not just a political space, it is highly legal too. As Rajamani (2016, 2024) notes, the climate regime is characterised by intricate legal frameworks that constrain and shape negotiation outcomes. This legal dimensionality is further emphasised by Bodansky, Brunnée and Rajamani, (2017) who observe that climate negotiations operate at the intersection of international law, domestic legal systems, and emerging transnational legal norms. As such, such disputes over meaning can cause the movement's collective voice to be weakened and challenged in negotiations, making it easier for norm antipreneurs to sideline or reframe the issues.²⁹⁸

Definitional ambiguity is also expressed in “intergenerational equity” norm. A lawyer who is an observer at the UNFCCC COPs noted:

Intergenerational equity is a very appealing, but vague, principle. From a lawyer's perspective, the devil is in the details: what does it mean in practice, and what obligations does it actually impose on states? In law, obligations are most meaningful when they are detailed and prescribe a specific course of action. Conceptually and morally, intergenerational equity is attractive [...] But when you ask what it means in terms of greenhouse gas emissions, there is rarely a clear answer. It functions well as a rhetorical device, yet it lacks the ‘teeth’ needed to strengthen the climate change regime. This is a broader problem with the regime itself. [...] Whether framed as intergenerational equity or otherwise, if a principle cannot be reduced to specific, legally binding obligations, it has limited utility. I would not say it has no value, but it becomes significantly less valuable in legal terms. (Interview with IP17)

Such reflection on intergenerational equity reveals how its moral appeal in climate governance is tempered by its legal vagueness. In international lawmaking, such broad principles gain acceptance because they avoid prescribing specific state obligations, thus accommodating divergent political interests. Yet this indeterminacy constrains their legal utility: without clear, enforceable content, they cannot be readily translated into domestic legislation or judicially enforceable duties. As a result, while intergenerational equity can shape discourse and advocacy, its influence on concrete legal outcomes remains limited unless states agree to codify it into binding, operational norms. In the Advisory Opinion of International Court of Justice where the Court observes that intergenerational equity is a form of equity, carrying the same legal weight in interpreting applicable rules. It should operate within the limits of the law (*infra*

²⁹⁸ See, *Chapter 7: COP Negotiation Processes, The Cover Decisions, and Normative Gains* to learn how norm antipreneurs work.

legem), ensuring that the interests of future generations and the long-term impacts of state actions are considered when implementing obligations under relevant treaties and customary international law (International Court of Justice, 2025).

Another barrier to influences is the instrumentalisation of the movement by political actors.²⁹⁹ The interviewee pointed out that key business or other state/non-state actors can co-opt or shape the rhetoric of youth movements. Although the moral and justice framings may appear authentic, their message is sometimes altered to serve external agendas. This creates a normative collision where the original equity or justice claims are diluted, favouring politically advantageous outcomes rather than a truly transformative agenda. As a result, the norm cluster intended to drive genuine reform can instead fracture, making it harder for negotiators to discern core demands.

A third barrier concerns the movement's reliance on external funding. Such financial support is perceived to undermine the independence and agency of social movements. One interviewee explains:

[As a regional facilitator, this] made me a bit uncomfortable working with youth movements; quite often they would look for funding because they want to go attend some conferences and then they would get connected with Member States outside of their continent. And then... when they engage with their Member States at COPs, the Member States ask, 'How come you're here?' and then they hear who is supporting them, and that would lessen their ability to convince their Member State because they're not fully independent. (Interview with IP02)

The reliance on external funding leads to questions about climate movement's autonomy and whether norms that are diffusing in the UNFCCC COP negotiations are indeed what the local actors would have wanted. The loss of perceived independence can weaken the moral authority of the movement, causing internal norm clusters to become entangled with external political interests. In turn, this may lead to scepticism among national delegates and reduce the movement's overall leverage in negotiations.

Another notable barrier is the absence dilution of normative content in the norms or strategic co-option by parties. While moral frames can mobilise public support, over-reliance on such advocacy rhetoric without translating it into concrete negotiation agendas may cause norm erosion or dilution of normative content. When discourse lacks substantive commitments that influence enforcement mechanisms, it risks becoming a mere slogan, losing its ability to form

²⁹⁹ Interview with IP02

norm clusters resilient to contestation in negotiation processes. Norm erosion occurs when changing material conditions, political interests, or competing normative frameworks undermine a norm's legitimacy and acceptance (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998). Such dilution of normative content and meaning happens when the conditions that originally supported a norm, such as widespread acceptance, institutional backing, and sustained advocacy no longer exist, or when new interests and alternative norms emerge to contest or replace them (Rosert and Schirmbeck, 2007; Großklaus, 2017; Tirion *et al.*, 2024). If states or influential actors no longer see compliance with a norm as beneficial, or if they actively promote conflicting norms, adherence can wane, leading to normative abandonment. For example, the common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR) as a norm experienced significant dilution of normative content during the transition from the Kyoto Protocol to the Paris Agreement. This is noted by a negotiator who shared during the interview:

Yes, CBDR; by the way, that's one that has evolved. CBDR, the meaning of CBDR—the generally understood meaning of CBDR—has evolved. From one where particular developing countries would say, "That's a principle that divides the world into two buckets," whereas we always said, "No, that's not the case." The sentence doesn't say "developed and developing countries respectively have different common but differentiated responsibilities"; it just says, "states have common but differentiated responsibilities and capabilities." But before Paris, because of these two different interpretations, we basically said, "As long as there is ambiguity about what this means, we won't agree to reference it." So, in Paris, now all the references say, "states have common but differentiated responsibilities and capabilities in light of different national circumstances." The emphasis is on the individual—basically, every country is different. We still get differences in emphasis and interpretation, but that is something new and distinct in Paris compared to the Framework Convention. The reason is twofold: Firstly, the only way that some parties would have agreed to it was through that clarification. And secondly, compared to 1992, there really is a spectrum of development. Back then, the world was divided between haves and have-nots, but it is become much more complicated. (Interview with IP18)

However, viewing norms as dynamic and evolving highlights how networks shape and contest their content and meaning through advocacy and internal change (True, 2024)—hence, such contestation also simultaneously help climate movements and transnational advocacy networks to engage in “trial-and-error processes” linking theory and practice (Krook and True, 2012, p. 117). As such, facilitating normative shifts. Here, the negotiator illustrates how CBDR has undergone a normative reinterpretation, shifting from a binary developed-developing framing toward a more flexible, country-specific application. This evolution reflects both political compromise and recognition of a more varied landscape of economic and developmental capacities. From a norms perspective, it shows how norms and normative content within the

climate regime are not static but are continually contested and renegotiated. Such contestation is a site of agency for state and non-state actors alike, as it opens opportunities for advocacy networks to influence further framing and coalition-building.

5.2.1.3 From Beyond COP Negotiations: Climate Litigation

Climate movements and their reinforcing strategies multiply beyond the UNFCCC COP negotiation space in such a way that their impact elsewhere revisits the negotiation space—transforming climate politics. Here, climate litigation as a strategy beyond COPs but complementary to it is analysed to study how global norms influence negotiations through climate movements that travel beyond COP spaces.

The intrinsic link between climate movements and climate litigation helps understand how litigation can be a tool for political transformation (see Ann Samuel, 2023). Climate litigation across the globe is rising exponentially (Mayer and van Asselt, 2023; Ann Samuel, 2024c; Tigre, Murcott and Ann Samuel, 2025), with 3162 cases worldwide according to Sabin Centre for Climate Change Law database (Sabin Center for Climate Change Law, 2025a). Through the interviews, the implications of such a surge in litigation indicated two primary causes (1) climate litigation situates itself within a larger political-societal transformation and influence the UNFCCC negotiations primarily through climate movements; (2) that core legal proceedings are defying political negotiation processes, critiquing its decades-long status quo of climate inaction, bolstering further climate movements.

Climate cases that emphasise the need for moral accountability of states and corporations are on the rise (Holmes, 2023). The moral and ethical framings that are more aligned with the activism around climate litigation than the legal arguments in the cases *per se*, influence politics. The Copenhagen COP failure in 2009 catalysed innovative climate activism combining digital and physical confrontational tactics while revitalising interest in climate litigation. Post-Paris Agreement, i.e., after 2015, legal mobilisation accelerated alongside other activism forms (Bouwer and Setzer, 2020). Environmental litigation has long been integrated with broader activist strategies rather than being a novel approach.

Rise in climate litigation is noted from 2018 after the global climate protests by Fridays for Future (Donger, 2022; Parker *et al.*, 2022; Ann Samuel, 2023; Kotzé and Knappe, 2023), owing to the parallel advocacies that have directly or latently influenced legal intervention. An interviewee stressed:

I think climate litigation has really sprung up because people now understand what's happening—especially regarding the 1.5°C threshold. That's when civil society around the world starts saying, 'This is happening, listen to us.' We are essentially losing our land and heritage, with places going underwater. (Interview with IP01)

Here, the language of "losing our land" and "our heritage" due to rising seas, invokes a strong moral appeal. It frames climate litigation as a response to an existential threat that is not merely technical but also an assault on a community's cultural and territorial integrity. This moral narrative helps justify taking legal action as a defence of fundamental rights. For instance, human rights law for climate vulnerable groups, defending economic social and cultural rights (i.e., right to education, right to health, right to household etc.), building legal arguments through constitutional law or public trust doctrine among others³⁰⁰—such rights-based perspectives strengthen moral frames that resonate strongly within and around legal proceedings.

Climate litigation, driven by a moral imperative for enforcement, reinforces lobbying efforts and strengthens normative advocacy:

You need to have enforcement mechanisms. You need to in fact put fire under the feet of the major polluters so that this process [climate action through negotiation] is accelerated. And the legal piece [...] is one way of doing that—to spell out for the major polluters that under pre-existing international law, you must do what is necessary and what is necessary is a radical mitigation in greenhouse gas emissions in order to prevent significant harm because my island Tuvalu is going under the sea or in the case of Bangladesh, we will have 40 million climate refugees. This is significant harm. It is catastrophic harm, and you are knowingly causing it by failing to change course. (Interview with IP17)

Here, the interviewee highlights how climate litigation in itself is a moral and urgent necessity—which calls for enforcement mechanisms that "put fire under the feet" of major polluters, using stark imagery to stress that inaction will lead to catastrophic outcomes, such as the disappearance of Tuvalu and the displacement of 40 million people in Bangladesh. The appeal is ethical: it demands that international law not only regulate behaviour but also serve as a moral bulwark against practices that imperil human lives and communities. By linking legal enforcement directly to the protection of vulnerable populations, the interviewee, who is also a lawyer and negotiator, reinforces a normative argument that ties the concepts of

³⁰⁰ The public trust doctrine (PTD) is a legal principle that states that the government holds natural resources in trust for the public. This includes air, water, trees, and shorelines.

accountability, human rights, and environmental stewardship into a single, compelling demand for radical change. The same interviewee observed:

There is of course the possibility also of bringing contentious cases against states, not merely requesting advisory opinions, which is where we are at with ITLOS and the ICJ. (Interview with IP17)

There are currently four parallel requests for advisory opinions for climate change in different world court/tribunals: i.e., in the International Court of Justice (ICJ), in the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACtHR), in the International Tribunal for Law of Sea (ITLOS), and The African Court of Human and Peoples' Rights (AfCHPR). ITLOS delivered its opinion on 21 May 2024; IACtHR released its opinion on 3 July 2025, and ICJ on 23 July 2025. Under advisory jurisdiction, courts and tribunals offer interpretations of international legal norms rather than resolving disputes, thereby contributing to the judicial development of international law and offering guidance to states to ratchet up climate ambition. Although these advisory opinions are not binding or enforceable, they remain valuable as authoritative statements of the law (Tigre, 2024b). In December 2022, the Commission of Small Island States on Climate Change and International Law (COSIS) asked ITLOS for an advisory opinion on United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) obligations to prevent marine pollution and protect the marine environment from climate impacts (Commission of Small Island States, 2022). In January 2023, Chile and Colombia requested an advisory opinion from the IACtHR to clarify state obligations and shared responsibilities for climate change (República de Chile and República de Colombia, 2023). In October 2022, Vanuatu announced plans to seek an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on states' duties to protect the climate system and the environment for current and future generations. Vanuatu orchestrated a comprehensive year-long campaign culminating in a UN General Assembly resolution adopted by consensus on March 29, 2023, which posed questions on states' climate responsibilities to the ICJ (United Nations, 2023). This participatory process engaged more than 1,500 civil society and youth organisations across 130 countries alongside extensive diplomatic consultations (see Tigre and Carrillo Bañuelos, 2023; Ann Samuel and Carrillo Bañuelos, 2025). The very proceedings of ICJ had a huge media traction (Scott, 2025). Further, there is ample evidence how SIDS collaborate with *Pacific Islands Students Fighting Climate Change* and *World's Youth for Climate Justice* in the processes for Advisory Opinion to ICJ, and further to strategic norm permeation in the COP processes (PISFCC, 2025; WYCJ, 2025). For instance, pavilions like the "Moana Pavilion" in UNFCCC COP Blue Zone, facilitate strategic norm diffusion where state and non-state actors meet (Ann Samuel, 2024d). As such, bolstering

normative arguments in and around the COP negotiations (Ann Samuel, 2024d; Ann Samuel and Nestor, 2024). In addition to these three advisory opinions, on May 2, 2025, a coalition of non-governmental organisations led by the *Pan African Lawyers Union*, in partnership with the *African Climate Platform, Resilient40, Natural Justice*, and the *Environmental Lawyer Collective for Africa*, filed a petition with AfCHPR (Tigre and Ann Samuel, 2025). The petition sought an Advisory Opinion on the human rights obligations of African States in relation to climate change (Pan African Lawyers Union, 2025). Therefore, these four parallel advisory opinions together push normative agenda in the UNFCCC COP negotiations.

A former UN official observes, with respect to the norm championship of Chile and Colombia in their request for advisory opinion to IACtHR:

Arguments about intergenerational equity, on the rights of the child, the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment. These kinds of, if I can use the kind of broad phrase, these rights-based arguments are far more prominent and far more accepted today than they were 10 or 15 years ago. [...] I think that [rights-based arguments] also embodies very well for the Inter-American Court's advisory opinion on the climate emergency. Now, to the extent, so these concepts of rights-based approaches, intergenerational equity and the rights of the child are now prominent topics in the climate negotiations. But I think we're still waiting for the day when the prominence of those conversations actually pushes the agenda forward in terms of more urgent and ambitious climate action. So that's the gap that still exists today... (Interview with IP05)

The two states, Chile and Colombia emphasised that the implications of this request extend well beyond the Americas and urged the Court to clarify how states should respond to the climate crisis—taking into account its varied impacts on different regions, population groups, nature, and overall human survival. Furthermore, this development brought prominence to several interconnected normative frameworks: human rights norms, climate justice norms, norms protecting children's rights, and intergenerational equity norms. Here too, these legal mobilisations had direct impact to the UNFCCC COP negotiation space.³⁰¹

The climate movements that are supporting activism around these legal proceedings are the same (and/or connected) to the one around UNFCCC COPs (Ann Samuel, 2024d, 2025). The four requests for advisory opinions have had impact on the negotiations (Ann Samuel, 2024d). Further, the ICJ advisory opinion was a result of coalitions and lobbying by university students:

Vanuatu, for example, its advisory opinion on the ICJ was born of the initiative of law students in the South Pacific University. So, the youth have been very much a part of that campaign. Once again, some governments will be much more receptive to the

³⁰¹ Interview with IP05, IP06, IP13

involvement of youth than others, depending on both their policy on the environment and the degree to which they are receptive to collaborating with civil society. (Interview with IP17)

The request for Advisory Opinion to ICJ is an excellent example of how youth and children across the globe have increasingly turned to litigation as a powerful tool to hold states and corporations accountable for climate inaction, framing the crisis as a violation of fundamental rights, including those of future generations. The soft power of these climate litigations have direct and indirect effect on climate negotiations (see Ann Samuel, 2023, 2024d; Tigre, Murcott and Ann Samuel, 2025); this is evidenced primarily through rise in the number of side-events at COPs where lawyers, activists, scientists and politicians grapple about legal questions and the relevance of the same in UNFCCC negotiations. McKenzie (2021) observes this particularly in COP26: where liability frameworks for loss and damage, responsibility attribution, scientific evidentiary standards, and non-state actor engagement which mirror both negotiations and jurisprudential questions were studied together. The norm diffusion through the advocacy of youth movements are best described through the timeline:

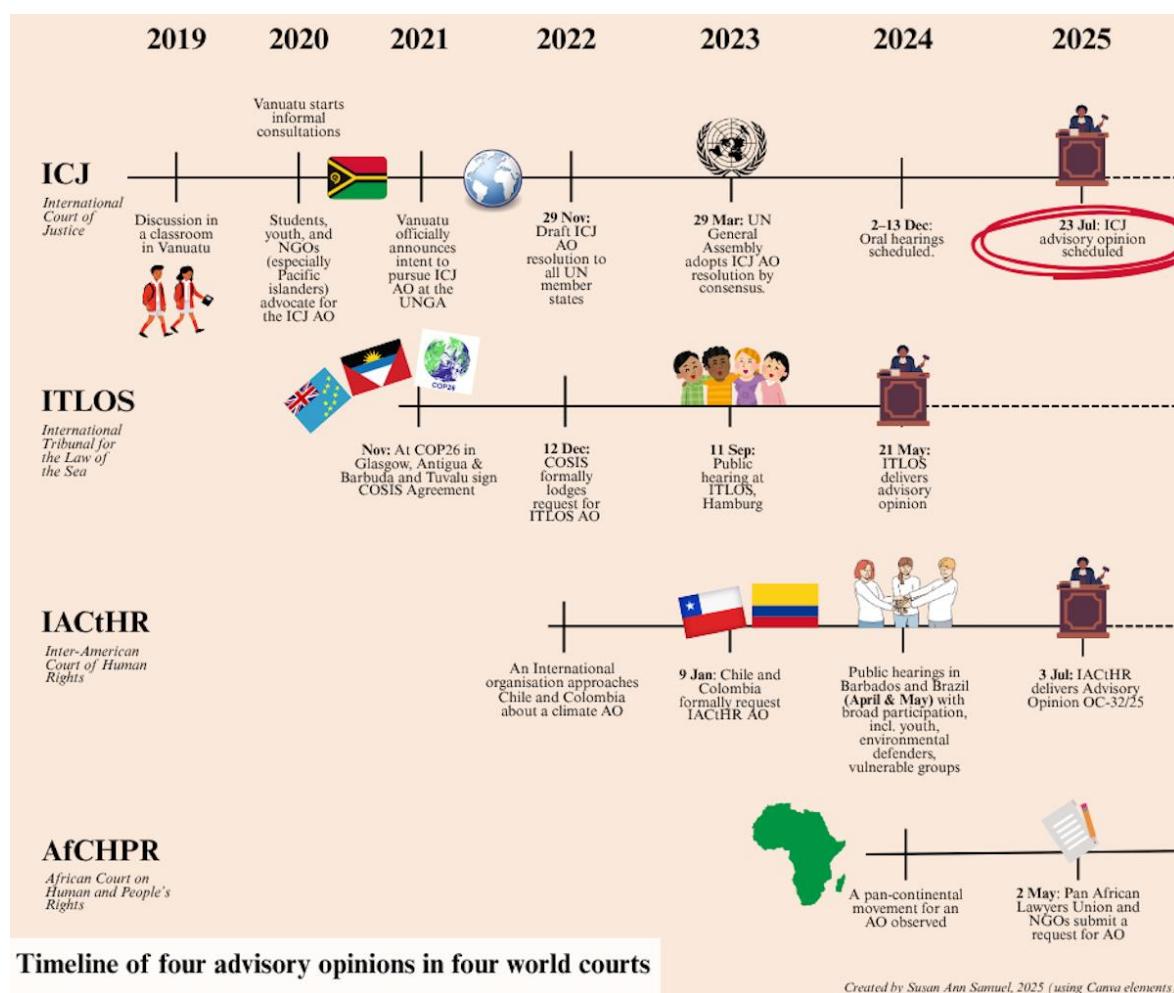


Figure 5.2: Timeline of four advisory opinions in four world courts – published in the Conversation UK (Ann Samuel, 2025)

In light of the increase in litigation trends, a negotiator commented:

I recall a time when all heads of state were present, and we worked closely with John Kerry and the Tuvaluan Prime Minister. They agreed to an exclusion clause [during negotiations] and are still widely criticised for it. This decision meant we lost momentum on compensation and liability in our normative framework. However, legal and scientific communities are advancing rapidly. Scientists are quickly attributing loss and damage from climate change, while legal experts are filing numerous cases. For example, there is an ongoing initiative to seek an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice, with Bangladesh preparing a submission through a New York law firm. Moreover, a Peruvian farmer has filed a case in Germany against an electricity company, and an Indonesian islander has taken action in Switzerland against Holcim. [There is a] project [...] to help a Bangladeshi victim file a case in Europe, America, or Australia. Civil society—including lawyers, academics, and observers—is moving forward despite now facing two types of polluters rather than one, making the struggle even tougher. Nonetheless, we must continue our efforts. (Interview with IP06)

Here, despite setbacks such as high-level political agreements that weakened compensation and liability measures, coalitions across legal, scientific, and civil society spheres—bolstered by transnational advocacy networks—have emerged to sustain norm diffusion across multiple fronts of law and politics at the domestic, transnational, and international levels. By coordinating diverse actors including NGOs, academics, and affected communities, these coalitions are using climate litigation as a tool to hold polluters accountable. Examples include various legal cases across jurisdictions like those filed in Germany and Switzerland (see Burri and Reyes, 2025; Walker-Crawford, Reyes and Petkov, 2025).³⁰²

Climate litigation has evolved into a strategic instrument that both shapes and responds to UNFCCC negotiations. The exponential growth in cases worldwide reflects how legal mobilisation amplifies normative pressure when diplomatic channels falter. Climate litigation, judicial activism and legal mobilisation are noted to influence the negotiation space, often advanced by climate movements (see Rajamani, 2018; Wewerinke-Singh, 2022; Ann Samuel, 2024c). For instance, efforts to recognise the right to a clean healthy and sustainable

³⁰² The case in Germany is *Luciano Lliuya v RWE AG* (Oberlandesgericht Hamm, Case No 5 U 15/17; Landgericht Essen, Case No 2 O 285/15; The case in Switzerland - *Asmania et al. v Holcim* (2022) A1 2023 9. See the supporting campaign for the abovementioned case in Switzerland (Call for Climate Justice, no date)

environment as a new human right in the Human Rights Council (HRC) in 2021³⁰³ and in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in 2022³⁰⁴—have directly influenced the inclusion of the right to a healthy environment in the Cover Decisions of COP27.³⁰⁵ The growing climate cases utilising the legal hook of right to a healthy environment and engaging the courts for judicial activism through legal mobilisation is noteworthy (see de Vilchez and Savaresi, 2021; Vanhala, 2022; Alston, 2023; Boyd, De Bona and Rodriguez-Garavito, 2024).

However, litigation also evokes barriers to the diffusion of global norms in the negotiations. For instance, the very success of advocacy through and around climate litigation may lead governments to become overly cautious.³⁰⁶ Fearing litigation, they might delay or water down ambitious legislation. This illustrates how norm clusters can collide with political and legal realities: the pursuit of justice and equity may inadvertently trigger defensive reactions that stifle further normative progress. During interview, a negotiator from the US, emphasised this when I specifically asked about how the US records the highest climate cases (c2025):

What drives our policy is politics. Not litigation. You know, I work for a democratic administration. Climate is a priority. We generally operate at the kind of limits of our authority, you know. So, we'll push things as far as we think we can. (Interview with IP18)

Although climate is declared a priority, the interviewee emphasises that the administration pushes policy only as far as its political authority allows rather than relying on legal action to force change. Under the current Republican government, the US has withdrawn from the Paris Agreement (initially in 2019, and now in 2025) and implemented policies to expand fossil-fuel production (Pullins, 2025). These actions illustrate a normative antipreneurship and reflect corporate lobbying influences. Although changes in government do not inherently undermine litigation efforts, they do affect how climate cases are adjudicated, raising concerns that such cases may not be judged fairly or yield concrete measures for accountability or enhanced ambition from states, corporations, or fossil-fuel lobbies.

³⁰³ Human Rights Council. (2021). The human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment (A/HRC/RES/48/13)

³⁰⁴ United Nations General Assembly. (2022). The human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment (A/RES/76/300).

³⁰⁵ See, *Sharm el-Sheikh Implementation Plan*: Decision 1/CP.24 and 1/CMA.4 (COP27 Cover Decision)

³⁰⁶ Interview with IP18

Conclusion

This chapter discussed the second research question of the thesis i.e., how referenced global norms influence negotiations and agreements in international climate politics through climate movements' actions. The central argument reveals that global norms exert influence through complex social dynamics where climate movements serve as primary vehicles for norm diffusion in UNFCCC negotiations. Climate movements and "networks also create novel spaces for contestation that enhance the validity and legitimacy of the norm" (True, 2024, p. 200). The chapter clarified how norm clusters proved resilient to contestation. Different frames of climate movements were studied, exploring how they aid normative shifts in negotiations.

Climate movements act as norm entrepreneurs who strategically employ multiple tactics: framing strategies that highlight moral imperatives, coalition-building which bridges diverse stakeholders, and campaigning that operates both inside and outside formal negotiation spaces. Their influence materialises through incremental shifts in negotiation language, where references to human rights, fossil fuel phase-out, and loss and damage are observed to gradually move from preambular mentions to operational text. However, such influence of global norms through climate movements also faces significant barriers like definitional ambiguities and political instrumentalisation. Despite these challenges, movements have successfully pushed certain norms to the center of climate governance discourse. Beyond the UNFCCC COP negotiations space, climate movements are observed to advance climate litigation, which amplifies normative pressure within the negotiation space—creating feedback loops—where litigation-negotiation nexus informs each other: strengthening norm diffusion.

This analysis lays crucial groundwork for addressing the third research question regarding norm champions and antipreneurs in climate negotiations, which will be addressed in the next chapter. Having established how norms can influence negotiations through deliberate framing, and strategic advocacy by climate movements, the subsequent chapter can more precisely identify which state actors advance these norm clusters, and which obstruct them. Understanding these competing normative forces will require examining how state actors strategically position themselves in climate politics, either reinforcing or contesting particular framings. This analysis will help observe the power dynamics underpinning climate negotiations and explain why certain norms gain traction while others remain contested. By identifying champions and antipreneurs, the research can further clarify the prospects for

normative transformation in global climate politics and the conditions under which different norm clusters might prevail.

Chapter 6: Norm Champions and Norm Antipreneurs

Chapter 6 explores the third research question of the thesis: *Who are the norm champions advocating for these global norms, and who are the antipreneurs blocking these global norms during the negotiations?*

Politics is a constant interplay between actors and structures, raising the question whether behaviour is autonomous or shaped by contextual factors.³⁰⁷ Recognising this interplay exposes how actors continually shape and are shaped by various influences of climate movements (as described in Chapter 5). These actors can be states or non-state actors that champion certain norms or norm clusters, thus persuading specific agenda items at UNFCCC COP negotiations. For instance, they persuade by leveraging economic power (e.g., European Union, the United Kingdom)³⁰⁸ or by invoking moral power (e.g., Small Island Developing States).³⁰⁹ The championing of global norms by actors or states is not without divergence, i.e., states will have their own political stance for certain agenda items even when they champion global norms. Accordingly, even as a state champions one global norm/norm cluster, it can also block another—whether deliberately or inadvertently. For instance, interview data shows how United Arab Emirates championed loss and damage norms while arguably blocking human rights norms.³¹⁰ Such political dynamics consequently expose the complexity of climate negotiations in the UNFCCC COP processes. Thus, a contextually sensitive analysis of the UNFCCC COP mechanism(s) through which different stakeholders and actors either facilitate or impede normative interaction—is essential to unpack the complex dynamics underlying norm championing and resistance within institutional settings.

For negotiations, UNFCCC categorises countries/states to *party groupings*, where in line with United Nations tradition, parties are divided into five regional groups primarily for the election of the Bureau.³¹¹ This facilitates individual as well as collective participation during the negotiations on specific agenda items. There are five regional groups, namely—African States, Asian States, Eastern European States, Latin American and Caribbean States, and Western

³⁰⁷ See, *Chapter 2: Literature Review*, where more literature on how norm champions and norm antipreneurs are discussed, thus, giving a premise to the analyses of this Chapter.

³⁰⁸ Interview with IP01, IP04

³⁰⁹ Interview with IP08, IP05, IP03

³¹⁰ Interview with IP01, IP04

³¹¹ The Bureau, elected from party representatives nominated by the five United Nations regional groups and Small Island Developing States, supports COP, CMP, and CMA (UNFCCC, no dateb).

European and Other States. The "Other States" category includes countries such as Australia, Canada, Iceland, New Zealand, Norway, Switzerland, and the United States of America (UNFCCC, 2025e). In addition, there are sixteen official negotiating blocs.³¹² Negotiating groups (often also understood as party groupings) are political or institutional coalitions formed by state parties to the UNFCCC and the Kyoto Protocol. Such alliances enable members to pool resources, exchange information, coordinate their voting strategies, present unified positions, and strengthen their collective influence, with the goal of ensuring that their perspectives and priorities are reflected in the outcomes of negotiation processes (Legal Response International, 2025). However, divergence is often evident even within regional blocs, as states, by virtue of their sovereignty, exercise individual agency in climate negotiations despite their collective identities and shared negotiating agendas.

Drawing primarily from the analysis of expert interviews from COP24-28, this chapter explores who the norm champions advocating for these global norms are and who the antipreneurs blocking these global norms during the negotiations are. To address this, the chapter will have three sub-sections: Who are the norm champions? *[Section 6.1]*; Who are the norm antipreneurs? *[Section 6.2]*; and What are the conflicts between norm champions and antipreneurs? *[Section 6.3]*.

6.1 Norm champions

Climate movements, as norm entrepreneurs, are linked to norm champions through transnational advocacy networks that call for normative change at multiple levels (Green, 2018a). Consequently, negotiators' choices are key to shaping the outcomes and conducting the business of COP negotiations. Norm champions pioneer norms introduced by norm entrepreneurs, often acting as multipliers for effective norm diffusion. Ideally, the most effective norm champions are connectors, i.e., they are actors with extensive networks that bridge different groups (Christakis and Fowler, 2011) and accelerate social tipping points by mobilising pride and shame (Mitchell and Carpenter, 2019; Petrova, 2019). While norm champions share conceptual similarities with, and overlaps with, norm entrepreneurs, their

³¹² African Group of Negotiators (African Group), Independent Association of Latin America and the Caribbean (AILAC), Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA), AOSIS (Alliance of Small Island States), Arab States, BASIC (Brazil, South Africa, India, and China), Coalition for Rainforest Nations (CfRN), Environmental Integrity Group (EIG), Group of 77 and China (G77 and China), Group of Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs), Grupo SUR (Group SUR), Least Developed Countries, Like-Minded, Mountain Group, and Umbrella Group.

distinctive analytical category emerges from their capacity to multiply global norms and amplify their normative meaning—thereby occupying a crucial intermediary position within diffusion processes (see [Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998](#); [Green, 2018](#); [Nisbett and Spaiser, 2023](#)). This theoretical distinction reflects the complex division of labour in active norm diffusion, wherein champions translate entrepreneurial innovations into sustainable institutional practices. In international climate negotiations, such agency—which accelerates the rate of norm clustering by multiplying influences around it—is key.³¹³

Analysis of the interviews has substantiated the identification of norm champions along with the norms they champion. Here, the thesis explored how states and/or state-coalitions/alliances act as norm champions. Through these analyses, norm champions are observed to liaise with norm entrepreneurs to further help norms to cluster in different combinations—allowing multidirectional diffusion (Brake and Katzenstein, 2013) within and beyond norm constellations.

6.1.1. Identifying Norm Champions

Certain states have been observed to champion specific norms or clusters of norms. Through systematic analyses of the interview data, I mapped the eight identified norms and their norm champions. It is important to note, however, that when a particular norm is actively championed, it often exhibits significant normative overlaps with other global norms. Hence, championing a norm will often mean championing other norms within a normative cluster. Substantiated by interview data, this section presents a nuanced yet discernible pattern of state actors and coalitions or alliances that have served as norm champions during the period from COP24 to COP28.³¹⁴

6.1.1.1 Anti-fossil fuel norms

Anti-fossil fuel norms have become an important but contested part of international climate negotiations under the UNFCCC. These global norms are championed primarily by states and coalitions including Small Island Developing States (collectively and as individual parties), the High Ambition Coalition, the European Union, the United Kingdom, the Umbrella Group, the Cartagena Dialogue, Least Developed Countries, and the Latin American countries. These actors use different but complementary strategies ranging from moral arguments and legal

³¹³ See, *Chapter 2 Review of Theory* to read more on norm champions, and how the development of this category of norm entrepreneurs is novel in IR literature.

³¹⁴ See *Chapter 3 Methodology*; the thesis focuses on the timeframe COP24-28

mobilisation around the COPs, to coalition-building and technical governance proposals within the negotiations space—to argue that reliance on fossil fuels is incompatible with the goals of the Paris Agreement. This section examines how these champions advance anti-fossil fuel norms and how their combined efforts influence negotiation outcomes despite resistance from other states.

Small Island Developing States (SIDS)³¹⁵ leverage existential vulnerability and moral authority to frame fossil fuel dependency as an injustice requiring reparations and accountability.³¹⁶ Although SIDS act as norm champions—multiplying global norms in their various normative contents and meanings,³¹⁷ their championing of anti-fossil fuel norms is well noted.³¹⁸ The interviewees specifically expressed how Vanuatu, Tuvalu, Maldives, Papua, Samoa, Tonga, and Antigua and Barbuda have championed anti-fossil fuel norms.³¹⁹ Their emphasis on states adopting concrete legal measures of climate governance frameworks that incrementally reduce fossil-fuel consumption and production is fundamental to their moral standing:

Minister Joseph from Antigua and Barbuda proposed establishing a regime: similar to a windfall tax.³²⁰ His argument was that the fossil fuel sector has sown the seeds for the demise of Small Island Developing States. To me, that means harm has been caused and it calls for amends. I believe this is the core of our discussion about what should happen and who should pay for compensation. I often delve into climate finance because it frames the policy directions for transitioning away from fossil fuels. Perhaps you heard the dialogues held in Dubai, where a minister from Tonga spoke about the inevitable losses his country, his people, and his culture will suffer—all for the profit of a few. The narrative isn't just about sustainable development; it is about the real

³¹⁵ SIDS as per the UNFCCC form a coalition of around 40 low-lying island nations, most of which belong to the G-77 and are especially at risk from rising sea levels (UNFCCC, 2025e). Here, I acknowledge that the United Nations Development Programme (2022) notes 58 SIDS, comprising of 38 UN Member States and 20 non-UN Members or Associate Members—span three geographical regions: Caribbean, Pacific, and AIMS (Atlantic, Indian Ocean, Mediterranean, South China Sea).

³¹⁶ Interview with IP11

³¹⁷ SIDS represent a diverse yet cohesive grouping without universal definition, functioning as both technical and political designation with self-determined membership to such a collective identity (Herbert, 2019). The international community first formally acknowledged these unique developmental challenges at the 1972 UNCTAD conference in Santiago, establishing the framework for this specialised categorisation (UNCTAD, 1972, 2017).

³¹⁸ Interview with IP01, IP13, IP17

³¹⁹ Interview with IP05, IP08, IP11, IP13, IP17, IP19, IP20

³²⁰ The windfall tax—is a levy imposed on companies that have benefited from something they were not responsible for; in other words, a windfall (see, Boyle, 2022; Frost, 2022)

harm inflicted on people and territories, which is simply unacceptable. (Interview with IP11)

Here, this presents a critical perspective on the fossil fuel industry's impact on SIDS, emphasising the need for accountability and reparations. Moreover, extending beyond the political sphere to encompass the strategic utilisation of legal avenues (see Ibrahim, 2023; Tigre, 2024; Ann Samuel and Bañuelos, 2025). For instance, SIDS pushed for the requests for advisory opinion to ICJ by Vanuatu, and ITLOS (by Commission of Small Island States on Climate Change and International Law).³²¹ Concerning the advisory opinions, a negotiator observed:

So, at the end of the day, the question is what have we got to lose by adding this tool [climate litigation] to the toolbox in trying to fight climate change? [...] What have we got to lose? We're going to go under the sea [...] (Interview with IP05)

SIDS employ a multifaceted strategy to assert their normative claims. They use existential and emotional discursive patterns for persuasion, thereby strengthening moral principles of justice, equity, solidarity, and duty of care, while calling on the international community to protect vulnerable nations

Another actor as a norm champion is High Ambition Coalition (HAC). By assembling both SIDS and progressive developed countries, the HAC uses consensus-building and high-profile public statements to set the negotiation agenda.³²² The chief negotiator for the Marshall Islands, Tony de Brum, who started HAC, orchestrated a strategic diplomatic initiative through discreet negotiations with the European Union, numerous developing nations, the United States, and other key actors, to build support for maintaining the 1.5°C temperature target on moral grounds (Harvey, 2021a). The HAC subsequently emerged publicly as a formal alliance of over 100 countries, including the US, Canada, and Australia. This coalition successfully secured the inclusion of the 1.5°C goal in the Paris Agreement in 2015. Farhana Yamin who advised the Marshall Islands, attributes the HAC's effectiveness to climate movements, informal networks and strategic relationships (2021). The coalition encompassed vulnerable states and major

³²¹ See *Chapter 5: Influence of Global Norms on Negotiations and Agreements – Section: 5.2.1.2 Tactics and Strategies: Strengthening Influences* to read more about climate litigation; there are four parallel advisory opinions to the four world courts/tribunal in the years 2022-2025. Although the mobilisation for an advisory opinion by the youths started as early as 2019 (see, Ann Samuel, 2025).

³²² Interview with IP06; The HAC, established in 2015 by the Republic of the Marshall Islands, is an informal, diverse group of developed and developing countries aimed to maximise the Paris Agreement's ambition (see, HAC, 2024).

emitters, enabling outcomes beyond minimal consensus, including Loss and Damage provisions (Mathiesen and Harvey, 2015; Yamin, 2021). An interviewee observed:

The High Ambition Coalition that's led by the Republic of Marshall Islands is cross regional: it has some developed countries, it has developing countries, it has SIDS, it has a mix of countries involved there. They do have a narrative of climate justice, of protecting the most vulnerable, of leaving no one behind. So that's probably a good example of that sort of coalition [as norm champion]. (Interview with IP11)

In the COP24–28 era, climate movements continued to support HAC goals.³²³ Amid public outcry for bold action (particularly after the 2018 IPCC report on 1.5 °C), the HAC was revitalised at COP26 in Glasgow. In 2021, the United States (US), under a pro-climate administration and responding to domestic activist pressure, rejoined the HAC to bolster the 1.5 °C effort (Harvey, 2021b). This collaboration reflected a convergence of political will across both developed and developing country parties, enabling the US to act as a bridge-builder and amplify the calls of smaller nations for stronger commitments—particularly on mitigation, transparency, and the 1.5°C target—while simultaneously reinforcing its own leadership position in the negotiation process (Harvey, 2021b). Together HAC members issued demands aligned with priorities advanced by climate movements: phasing out coal, ending fossil fuel subsidies, and doubling adaptation finance for poorer nations. The Marshall Islands' envoy Tina Stege—a key HAC leader, explicitly set out a vision for Glasgow COP26 that included “real actions, like phasing out coal; a sea-change on adaptation finance; and support to address the loss and damage we’re already experiencing” (Harvey, 2021b).

At COP26, the European Union (EU)’s promotion of a fossil fuel phase-out, despite opposition from emerging and developing countries that favour a phase-down, demonstrates its commitment to stronger environmental standards.³²⁴ Another notable norm champion of anti-fossil fuel norms is the United Kingdom (UK). The UK is no longer part of the European Union’s negotiating bloc within the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Following its departure from the EU in January 2020 (post-Brexit), the UK ceased to participate in the EU’s internal coordination on climate negotiations. The UK emerged as a norm champion by leveraging its diplomatic influence to drive a transition away from fossil fuels—spearheaded by the UNFCCC COP26 presidency under the leadership of Alok Sharma,

³²³ Interview with IP03, IP06, IP11

³²⁴ Interview with IP06

who is Member of the House of Lords of the United Kingdom and was appointed full-time president for COP26. One interviewee noted:

Clearly, in the last few years, there has been a movement to integrate provisions or texts on fossil fuels at the COP. It started with COP 26 and the Glasgow Climate Pact, with its call for phasing down unabated coal. Now, we have COP 28 in Dubai with the call for transitioning away from fossil fuels. Climate movements have had an influence, but you need to unpack who the different actors are. Outside pressure from various actors in this movement has made it easier to integrate this language, which wasn't there for almost three decades. However, the coal language in COP 26 is not just due to the climate movement. It is because the UK government made it a priority, spearheaded by the Powering Past Coal Alliance. They received support from NGOs and other actors who thought it was a good opportunity to address coal. When addressing fossil fuels, one can argue this has always been in the background. In the last six or seven years, it has emerged more clearly. You can trace it back to the late 2000s when the first activists pointed out that if we are to keep global warming below 2 degrees, we cannot burn all the fossil fuels we have in reserve. Bill McKibben, who later founded 350.org, and the Carbon Tracker Initiative, which produced reports about the carbon bubble and stranded assets, popularised these ideas. Papers by Paul Ekins of UCL and Christophe McGlade highlighted the incompatibility of fossil fuels and climate goals. Around this time, I also became interested in these questions. (Interview with IP07)

The interviewee traces the temporal evolution of fossil fuel language in climate negotiations, progressing from peripheral concern in the late 2000s to its first significant integration in the *Glasgow Climate Pact* at COP26. This evolution reflects the cumulative influence of various actors: early activists and academics (like Bill McKibben, the Carbon Tracker Initiative, Paul Ekins, and Christophe McGlade). Further, UNFCCC COP26 President, Alok Sharma strategically advocated for fossil fuel phase-out and secured unprecedented climate finance commitments for developing nations, culminating in the *Glasgow Climate Pact's* historic explicit mention of fossil fuels. Empirical evidence from interview data reinforces the significance of individual agency:

The ambition of a country is often followed by personal leadership; Mr. Sharma was just very direct and vocal. (Interview with IP13)

The advocacy of the Umbrella Group³²⁵ primarily focuses universal participation and less differentiation in commitments: emphasising that effective climate action requires all major economies to curb emissions, not just the Annex I (developed) countries. As such, this bloc has

³²⁵ Umbrella Group is an informal coalition of non-EU developed countries that includes Australia, Canada, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, and the United States. In 2023, the United Kingdom (UK) formally joined the Umbrella Group.

argued that the Paris Agreement's temperature goals ("well below 2 °C, preferably 1.5 °C") must be met by contributions from all countries, developed and developing (Gupta, 2021). They also insist on common standards of transparency and reporting for all parties, rejecting the strict bifurcation between Annex I and Non-Annex I that existed under the Kyoto Protocol (Gupta, 2021). Underlying these positions is the understanding that current and future emissions matter more than historical emissions—a stance often at odds with the climate justice framing. Thus, when Umbrella Group is often seen as a norm champion of anti-fossil fuel norms, the complex nuanced analysis of the climate negotiations can also make them arguably come under norm antipreneurs to climate justice norms.³²⁶

Cartagena Dialogue for Progressive Action (or Cartagena Dialogue), led by the UK—which usually functions behind-the-scenes aligning interested countries and stakeholders to promote common positions in multilateral settings.

And then there is also not really outspoken in terms of sending out statements but working in the background is another grouping called the Cartagena Dialogue that's led by the UK. [...] And it again, it is cross regional. It is more about sharing of ideas. But a lot of the time the ideas are aligned with sort of fundamental values—that we need to do, we need like 1.5. I would call that a value. I would even call that norm. [...] (Interview with IP11)

Here, the network focuses primarily on anti-fossil fuel norms—i.e., by mitigation efforts to keep the average global temperature rise below 1.5 degrees. The interviewee highlights that since conversations around 1.5 is surging in the negotiations, it is not just a value but a norm—and hence requiring a nuanced comprehension of how it is diffusing forward.

Another group of norm champions are from the Least Developed Countries (LDCs)—either as a bloc and/or as state parties individually.³²⁷ Least Developed Countries like Bangladesh demonstrate normative authenticity through concrete domestic actions, shutting down coal power stations to align practice with advocacy, thereby strengthening the moral legitimacy of anti-fossil fuel norms across diverse negotiating contexts.

³²⁶ See, *Chapter 6: Norm Champions and Norm Antipreneurs - Section 6.2 Norm Antipreneurs*, to unpack how states and alliances often have nuanced and dynamics positions and agency in advancing or blocking global norms in climate negotiations.

³²⁷ LDC constitute 46 nations as identified by the United Nations. Eight countries have graduated from least developed country status (countries are: Botswana, Maldives, Samoa etc). Further, Bangladesh, the Democratic Republic of Lao, and Nepal are scheduled for graduation in 2026; Solomon Islands is scheduled for graduation in 2027; and Cambodia and Senegal are scheduled for graduation in 2029.

In addition, states and alliances/coalitions in Latin America champion anti-fossil fuel norms. ALBA coalition (Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America; or in Spanish *Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América*), comprising countries like Bolivia, Venezuela, Cuba, and Nicaragua are the most vocal in insisting on deep emissions cuts by developed nations while refusing similar obligations for developing countries (Dialogue Earth, 2021). They frequently invoke the notion of a climate debt owed by rich countries and demand far-reaching redistribution and reparations. However, in their advocacy of anti-fossil fuel norms the norm clusters with global earth stewardship norms, human rights norms, and climate justice norms strongly.³²⁸ Several other groups in Latin America also work together in the climate change process. The Independent Alliance of Latin America and the Caribbean (AILAC) coalition (e.g. Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica) similarly emerged as a “revolt of the middle”—a group of moderate-income countries breaking from the old North–South dichotomy to “offer real ambition” and demand that all nations undertake commitments (Roberts and Edwards, 2012). AILAC countries advocate aligning with the Paris Agreement’s goals regardless of traditional development status, a norm consonant with many NGOs’ calls for universal climate action coupled with support. Climate movements have lauded AILAC’s leadership: these countries have often worked closely with advocacy groups and think tanks to advance issues like transparency, human rights, and economy-wide targets (for example, Costa Rica’s negotiators, such as Mónica Araya, explicitly framed AILAC’s mission as adapting to a “changing world” where “all nations take on binding obligations” (Méndez, 2012).

In sum, the interplay of moral principles between cross-regional coalition diplomacy, and strategic norm entrepreneurship has recalibrated the traction of anti-fossil fuel norms in the UNFCCC negotiations, shifting the normative discourse. The cumulative effect of existential framing by the most vulnerable, activist-aligned agenda amplification by hybrid coalitions, and procedural innovations that transcend formal negotiating blocs has forced various actors to engage with evolving language even amidst resistance and normative contestation. This dynamic illustrates how norm evolution in climate negotiations is neither linear nor consensual, but advances through iterative cycles of advocacy, resistance, and reframing, in which strategic alliances and normative consistency can incrementally erode entrenched fossil-fuel interests while broadening the legitimacy and political ambition for mitigation objectives.

³²⁸ See Chapter 6: *Norm Champions and Norm Antipreneurs* – Section 6.1.1.2 *Climate Justice norms*

6.1.1.2 Climate Justice norms

Climate justice norms are advanced most prominently by coalitions of vulnerable states and progressive actors who strategically convert structural marginalisation into moral authority.

SIDS, through their negotiating bloc, the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), serve as a normative anchor, mobilising existential framing and sustained advocacy tracing back to the 1989 Mali Declaration. The LDCs deploy compelling justice-oriented claims often strategically clustering them with loss and damage norms. In Latin America, alliances such as the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA) embed climate justice within broader regional frameworks, while African states channel equity-based claims. High-profile individual norm entrepreneurs, including Mary Robinson and the late Saleemul Huq, have operated as pivotal connectors—translating civil society mobilisation into formal negotiation outcomes. By mapping these actors and their strategies, the analysis elucidates how climate justice norms are championed, diffused, and operationalised within the evolving architecture of international climate governance.

For SIDS, existential threats like sea level rise, disappearing islands, climate migration, and the loss of cultural identity render them especially vocal in articulating vulnerability, survival, and diminished capabilities through moral framings.³²⁹ They leverage their unique vulnerabilities, to advocate for norms such as climate justice.³³⁰ Prime Minister Mia Mottley has consistently amplified climate-justice imperatives—a role further evidenced in interview data underscoring the importance of individual agency:

The ambition of a country is often followed by personal leadership; [...] From Barbados, their representative is out there speaking forcefully, saying “We need climate finance now” (Interview with IP13)

These individuals further bolster the position of SIDS using collective bargaining and shared narratives to increase their leverage. The advocacy of AOSIS dates to even before UNFCCC’s formal adoption in 1992. An interviewee observed how they prioritise the advocacy and diffusion of climate justice norms:

So, in the larger grouping of the Alliance of Small Island States there are specific views that have been, you know, long defined, what AOSIS is about. Since 1989, when the Mali Declaration was agreed to, it was about ensuring that the small island developing states are going to be protected against global warming and sea level rise, and so it had that perspective of cooperation. Of ensuring that we’re thinking in terms of protecting

³²⁹ Interview with IP05

³³⁰ Interview with IP03

the most vulnerable. So, it does have that sort of climate justice lens, even if it were not defined as climate justice at the time. (Interview with IP11)

The quote illustrates how alliances such as AOSIS play a central role in shaping and sustaining norm constellations within climate negotiations. These constellations refer to the coexistence and interaction of multiple overlapping normative frameworks that are advanced collectively through strategic alliances—often intersecting with climate movements (and pressure beyond negotiation rooms).³³¹ The interviewee situates AOSIS within a historical trajectory of cooperative norm diffusion, rooted in moral principles and collective identity. Another interviewee observed:

If the AOSIS group speaks as one, I definitely think it makes a difference for sure.
(Interview with IP08)

Importantly, while the term “climate justice” may not have been explicitly used in earlier declarations, the substance of the norm—focused on fairness, historical responsibility, and protecting those least responsible for climate change—was already embedded in AOSIS’s discourse.³³² Their consistent presence and strategic use of collective bargaining highlight the power of transnational coalitions in elevating marginalised voices and embedding justice-oriented norms within international regimes. Moreover, SIDS strategically leverage external advocacy, aligning their narratives with concrete scientific and legal demands.

The Least Developed Countries (LDCs) not only champion climate justice norms, but their invocation of the moral principles of duty of care, justice, and equity makes their advocacy and efforts for multidimensional norm diffusion, unique. This is because global efforts toward decarbonisation face a critical equity challenge. The UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)’s *Least Developed Countries Report 2022* released ahead of COP27 (UNCTAD, 2022a, 2022b) observes that 46 LDCs—representing approximately 1.1 billion people—constitute the definitive benchmark against which the fairness of climate transition initiatives will ultimately be evaluated. As such, the report frames LDCs as a “litmus test” by which “history will judge how effectively efforts to make the low-carbon transition consider development needs and countries’ different obligations and capacities to fight climate change.” (UNCTAD, 2022b). These states present a stark climate justice paradox: while contributing less than 4 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions in 2019, they have suffered 69 per cent of worldwide climate disaster fatalities over the past five decades (UNCTAD, 2022b). Such

³³¹ Interview with IP01, IP13, IP20

³³² Interview with IP08

vulnerability paradoxically provides LDCs with unique normative leverage in multilateral climate negotiations—strategically transforming their unique positionality into liaising discursive resources, effectively advocating for normative frameworks centred on norms of climate justice, loss and damage, anti-fossil fuel norms, and intergenerational equity norms. Through sophisticated coalition-building strategies with similarly positioned states (e.g., SIDS) and civil society organisations (especially the youth movements; interviews amplify how the late Saleemul Huq liaised with young norm entrepreneurs like Greta Thunberg, encouraging Fridays for Future, Extinction Rebellion and more),³³³ In doing so, LDCs have successfully navigated institutional constraints to amplify their normative claims beyond their traditional diplomatic capacity.

For Latin American countries and coalitions, Bolivia and its ALBA allies denounced the weak Copenhagen Accord in 2009 and later organised the People's Conference on Climate Change in Cochabamba (2010) alongside global civil society, promulgating the 'Rights of Mother Earth' and other justice-centric frames of normative discourses (Koenig, 2010). This alignment with grassroots climate justice networks has continued.³³⁴ ALBA delegates often coordinate with climate justice NGOs at COPs and their interventions primarily focus on the need to prioritise inclusive, transparent decision-making in the political process of climate negotiations.

A notable individual norm champion is Mary Robinson, Former Irish President and UN High Commissioner for Human Rights who pioneered climate justice, explicitly connecting human rights norms with climate action that emphasise moral principles like intergenerational equity, gender justice, and solidarity. Her advocacy radically re-empowers both Global North and South to underpin normative themes for bold climate action and ambition:

The COP28 agreement, while signalling the need to bring about the end of the fossil fuel era, falls short by failing to commit to a full fossil fuel phase out. If 1.5°C is our 'North Star', and science our compass, we must swiftly phase out all fossil fuels to chart a course towards a liveable future. To fail to keep global warming below 1.5°C has catastrophic implications for the most vulnerable communities and countries. At a time of profound global challenges, that nations have managed to salvage enough common ground in Dubai to keep the climate action process moving forward is notable. Progress on loss and damage and tripling renewable energy demonstrate the vital role of multilateralism in addressing the climate crisis. However, at COP28 transparency, equity and climate justice have been undermined by misleading language, false

³³³ Interview with IP01, IP13, IP20.

³³⁴ Interview with IP04, IP13, IP18

solutions and game-playing. Furthermore, the final agreement lacks the critical financial keys to unlock the trillions of dollars needed for any just transition. Without providing the necessary means for implementation we doom those countries on the frontlines of the climate emergency to failure. (French, 2023)

Mary Robinson's statement on the COP28 agreement exemplifies her distinctive approach to norm diffusion in climate negotiations through three key strategies. First, she employs normative reframing by invoking metaphorical language (i.e., "1.5°C is our 'North Star', and science our compass") to transform technical climate targets into moral imperatives. This rhetorical approach connects scientific boundaries with moral and ethical obligations. Second, she demonstrates strategic bridging between climate movements and political processes, by acknowledging multilateral progress while simultaneously highlighting shortcomings. Robinson validates activist concerns while remaining engaged with formal processes. Third, Robinson employs concrete norm specification by explicitly connecting abstract justice principles to specific implementation mechanisms. This approach reflects her longstanding strategy of translating broad equity demands into specific policy requirements, particularly around climate finance. By focusing on means of implementation for vulnerable countries, she centres intergenerational and North-South equity norms that climate justice movements have championed, further multiplying the influence of movements within negotiations by re-emphasising as well as critiquing policies and status quo of political action.

African Negotiators are prominently noted to champion climate justice norms. They position themselves as champions of a more just and equitable climate regime. An interviewee who has worked with African negotiators emphasised their dilemma for climate 'ambition':

Fundamental issue is climate injustice between the Global North and South: When it comes to who should be more ambitious? And how do you deal with sustainable development? (Interview with IP01)

African negotiators use a combination of normative argumentation and coalition building to press their agenda forward. They work through regional negotiating blocs, such as the African Group of Negotiators (AGN), to form a united front.³³⁵ The AGN was established at COP1 in Berlin, Germany in 1995 as an alliance of African member states (currently comprising 54 parties) representing the interests of the region in the international climate change negotiations, with a common and unified voice. By coordinating within regional blocs, they not only consolidate their demands but also increase their bargaining power in multilateral fora. Their

³³⁵ Interview with IP13

tactics include demanding that the climate finance architecture account for the limited fiscal space within which African countries operate, and that funding arrangements address both mitigation and adaptation needs.³³⁶ As one interviewee noted:

African countries which are worried about being left behind, not able to exploit the fossil fuel resources they do have and benefit from it, but not able to have access to the energy of the future that they need either. So, you get multiple concerns, and I think those will be growing. So, I think the transition away from fossil fuels is a key step, but I think it is an opening to a real debate about how do we make that possible for everyone. (Interview with IP16)

This sentiment highlights their strategy of linking the need for development with climate justice, thereby clustering norms related to loss and damage, the right to development, human rights, and equity. African countries contribute significantly to the clustering of several interrelated norms. Their advocacy reinforces Loss and Damage norms, climate justice norms and human rights norms. African negotiators stress that climate change is inseparable from the right to development as a human rights issue—particularly for vulnerable communities facing poverty and resource scarcity.³³⁷ Equity norms are championed especially through the need for Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR) which calls for a framework that accounts for historical emissions and present capabilities.³³⁸

In sum, climate justice norms within the UNFCCC negotiations are championed through a complex web of coalitions, regional blocs, and individual norm entrepreneurs whose legitimacy is rooted in moral authority, historical responsibility, and structural vulnerability. From SIDS’ existential framing to LDCs’ equity-based demands, from ALBA’s radical justice discourse to African negotiators’ integration of human rights and development imperatives, these actors deploy strategic coalition-building, normative reframing, and advocacy alliances with civil society to embed justice-oriented principles in global climate governance. Their collective efforts reveal that climate justice as a meta-norm transcends beyond a peripheral narrative to actionable claims for justice and equity.

6.1.1.3 Intergenerational Equity norms

Intergenerational equity norms within the UNFCCC COPs are championed by various states and coalitions like the SIDS, and states like Vanuatu, Chile, Columbia and the UK. However,

³³⁶ Interview with IP14

³³⁷ Interview with IP14

³³⁸ Interview with IP14, IP02, IP03

instances in which states and/or coalitions explicitly championed intergenerational equity norms typically occurred within the broader advocacy of other normative frameworks (i.e., when efforts are pursued to mainstream intergenerational equity norms in other agenda items).³³⁹ In most cases, intergenerational equity appeared as part of a clustered set of norms—most commonly alongside loss and damage, climate justice, and human rights—where its articulation was reinforced through association with these norms.

One of the main norm champions in the timeframe of COP24-28 was the SIDS. A notable example for an external trigger was Vanuatu's request for an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice—an initiative originally conceived by twenty-seven university students in Vanuatu.³⁴⁰ This grassroots origin positioned the state to amplify the effort through a parallel socio-political campaign, thereby linking domestic civic mobilisation with formal international legal action for political will—that had direct/indirect relevance to the UNFCCC COPs.³⁴¹ In the parallel requests to Inter-American Court of Human Rights, Chile and Columbia were observed to champion intergenerational equity mainstreaming human rights norms—which in turn had effects to the climate negotiations.³⁴²

Another momentum that bolsters intergenerational equity in the UNFCCC COP negotiation space is through the Climate Youth Negotiator Program (CYNP)³⁴³—where young negotiators from different countries are trained to tackle diverse agenda items and mainstream intergenerational equity norms. An interviewee spoke:

The UN Secretary-General, in many of his speeches, referring to young people as “the architects of their future” and calling for their involvement in decision-making. Although these are speeches and not formal texts, his position gives him unique value in the UN system, and we can hold him accountable for what he says. This would be the third example I consider relevant. Because of the work we [Youth Negotiators Academy] do, the concept of intergenerational justice has gained prominence. For example, one of the primary outcomes we seek is intergenerational justice—building equity for young people and placing them inside national negotiation teams. (Interview with IP20)

The founders of Youth Negotiator Academy are from Switzerland, United Kingdom, and India. Although the Youth Negotiator Academy is a norm entrepreneur *per se*, the negotiators they

³³⁹ See for instance, *Chapter 6: Norm Champions and Norm Antipreneurs - Section 6.1.1.4 Loss and Damage*.

³⁴⁰ Interview with IP17

³⁴¹ See Chapter 5 on Climate Litigation.

³⁴² Interview with IP05

³⁴³ See, *Chapter 5: Influence of Global Norms on Negotiations and Agreements - Section 5.2.1.2.2 Coalition Building Across the Blue-Green Zone(s)*

train are observed to evolve as norm champions. Amongst the norms they champion, their very presence in itself embody the championing of intergeneration equity norms.

During France's presidency at COP21, Young and Future Generations Day was conducted for the first time—a non-stop celebration of youth power and participation at UN climate change conferences. Youth-led side events, workshops, and activities took place throughout the day, with a continuous stream of creative actions that prove young people are key players in reaching innovative and ambitious solutions to climate change. Youth participation was further institutionalised under Egypt's COP27 presidency (Sharm el-Sheikh, 2022), which designated a stand-alone Youth and Future Generations Day and hosted the first-ever Children and Youth Pavilion—providing a formal, youth-led space inside the Blue Zone—alongside the first Youth-led Climate Forum.

The United Kingdom delivered the Glasgow Work Programme on Action for Climate Empowerment (UNFCCC, 2021). Under the UK presidency, parties adopted a 10-year ACE work programme that operationalises education, participation and public access to information—explicitly grounded in the Paris Agreement's preambular reference to intergenerational equity.

In sum, from COP24 to COP28, intergenerational equity norms in UNFCCC negotiations were advanced primarily through the leadership of SIDS, Vanuatu, Chile, Colombia, and the UK, often in alliance with youth movements and transnational advocacy networks. These actors embedded intergenerational equity within broader rights-based and justice-oriented agendas, using legal initiatives, diplomatic campaigns, and institutional mechanisms such as the Glasgow Work Programme on ACE to amplify its presence. While these efforts have elevated the norm's visibility and legitimacy, its influence continues to depend on the sustained engagement of these champions and their ability to convert rhetorical commitments into substantive action.

6.1.1.4 Human Rights norms

A number of states and alliances champion human rights norms in the UNFCCC COP space. One notable norm champions for human rights and the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment are Small Island Developing States.³⁴⁴ In the negotiations, the European Union and European states has emerged as a norm champion specifically advocating for human rights-

³⁴⁴ Interview with IP05

based approaches, however, their role is nuanced and sometimes contested. For instance, with human rights norms, an interviewee expressed:

The EU always supports human rights, but they won't necessarily stick their neck out for it... (Interview with IP03)

Here, the interviewee notes EU's cautious approach in openly championing human rights norms. This comes in contrast to how Norway was instrumental in getting the term "human rights" in the preamble.³⁴⁵ This throws light to key dynamics in climate negotiations where norm contestation dictates outcomes, where resiliency of a norm or norm cluster becomes relative to the competing material interests and differentiated responsibilities of participating actors.³⁴⁶ Further internal dynamics within the EU and among its negotiating partners dilutes human rights language, as one interviewee observed:

You don't always know exactly what happens... when somebody raises it in the public space, you know who is willing to actually go to the mat on human rights. (Interview with IP06)

Such dynamics reflect the inherent challenges of a consensus-based process, where the EU's normative aspirations are constantly balanced against both domestic political constraints and opposing international interests. Thus, the EU's role as a norm champion in climate negotiations is multifaceted. It employs a combination of selective normative advocacy, legislative innovation, and strategic coalition-building to cluster norms around climate justice, human rights, environmental integrity, and a more aggressive fossil fuel phase-out. Here, it is also noted how normative themes championed by EU undergo continuous reinterpretation and adaptation through processes that reflect underlying power asymmetries (amongst states and with other regional powers) while simultaneously creating space for incremental progress. Further, these positions reflect norms of scientific urgency and multilateral cooperation that have been reinforced by European climate movements. Mass youth protests across Europe in 2019 elevated climate to the top of the political agenda, contributing to record Green party gains and pressuring EU leaders to adopt more aggressive policies (Abnett *et al.*, 2024). Thus,

³⁴⁵ Interview with IP04

³⁴⁶ See, how norm resiliency of norm clusters often aligns with the issue links that build cohesiveness in norm clusters (Lantis and Wunderlich, 2018). In climate negotiations, norms are often always observed to exist in clusters. Anti-fossil fuel norms' issue link(s) with climate justice and intergenerational equity re-evokes robustness – where synergized normative themes are prominent and often bolstered by movements and networks (Keck and Sikkink, 1997).

the strategic norm permeation is noted by accounting as to how the public moral persuasion has resulted in the European negotiators taking it forward within the UNFCCC COPs.

Further, the countries within EU have their own agency irrespective of collective agency. It is noteworthy how Slovenia championed the right to a healthy environment, so that the term is included in the COP27 cover decision:

So, I mean, you know, our Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) has been a part of that push for recognition of the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment. I'd say it is a push that's been a long time in the making. The UN General Assembly (UNGA) resolution really reflects the culmination of a big global movement for recognition of the right to a healthy environment. In terms of how it is impacted the climate negotiations, the simplest and most obvious thing to say is that it was incorporated in the COP 27 cover decision and CMA cover decision. By 'incorporated', I mean there is a reference to the GA resolution. We actually worked with members of the core group for that Human Rights Council (HRC) resolution and GA resolution, which include Slovenia, Costa Rica, Switzerland, Maldives, and Morocco. Slovenia, in particular, took a real interest in trying to see this integrated into the COP outcome. (Interview with IP03)

The role of Slovenia, therefore, posits a clear picture of helping norm diffusion through internalisation of human rights norms in the COP27 cover decision text.³⁴⁷

Latin American countries tend to be progressively at the forefront of pushing for ambitious climate outcomes (Solorio, 2024) by often clustering norms such as the right to a healthy environment, loss and damage, and intergenerational equity. Mexico have distinguished themselves through resolute leadership:

Mexico is, I'd say, the country that most frequently is willing to really stick their neck out for a human rights outcome. Mexico has a feminist foreign policy and an incredibly effective lead negotiator who just gets things done. (Interview with IP03)

Latin American states often form alliances with other vulnerable nations and civil society actors. For instance, they frequently work to promote human rights-based language in the cover texts and ensure that their collective concerns are heard. Such coalitions strengthen the individual countries' bargaining power and help push forward demands related to human rights, loss and damage, and intergenerational equity. In addition, AILAC is observed to push for rights-based, emission-free obligations (Méndez, 2012). For instance, there were explicit

³⁴⁷ See further, *Chapter 7: COP Negotiation Processes, The Cover Decisions, and Normative Gains* to read how cover texts reflect the negotiations and political dynamics.

mentions from interviewees highlighting AILAC's efforts in diffusing human rights norms in the UNFCCC COP space.³⁴⁸

African Negotiators champion human rights norms. One interviewee reflection captures the stand of African negotiators:

I have attended meetings of the Friends of Human Rights and Climate Change for a number of years. I have witnessed considerable push back from some developing countries around the notion of human rights as they see this as a developed country construct and not relevant in their circumstance. To some extent this also applies to “just transition”. Not a lot of analysis has been made on what just transition means for developing countries. There has been work in South Africa but little elsewhere in the developing world. (Interview with IP19)

This statement underscores that despite contestation over the relevance of human rights in climate negotiations, African voices insist that such norms must be central to addressing climate injustice. Just transition to them is not an option but they key for climate ambition. African voices insist that human rights norms must be central to addressing climate injustice through pro-poor development and equity-based positions relevant for Africa in the international climate change dialogues (Pan African Climate Justice Alliance, 2020). The deliberate championing of African countries come under the premise of what the NGOs have been building around different converging platforms—socio-politically and legally—that directly or indirectly have a say in the COP negotiations. For instance, the advisory opinion with the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights on May 2, 2025 (Tigre and Ann Samuel, 2025).

In sum, the championing of human rights norms within the UNFCCC COP space emerges as a complex, multi-layered process shaped by the interplay of diverse actors, strategic alliances, and the broader geopolitical context. While certain states and regional blocs—such as SIDS, the EU, Latin American coalitions, and African negotiators—demonstrate leadership in advancing rights-based approaches, their advocacy is mediated by varying degrees of political will, domestic constraints, and contestation from other parties. Norm diffusion in this arena is rarely linear; rather, it unfolds through iterative processes of coalition-building, normative clustering, and selective framing that reflect both solidarity across vulnerable constituencies and the realities of power asymmetries in global climate governance.

³⁴⁸ Interview with IP03, IP05, IP11

6.1.1.5 Loss and Damage norms

The diffusion of loss and damage norms has been a hard-fought reality within the UNFCCC negotiations, with norm champions emerging mainly from among the Small Island Developing States, Least Developed Countries, select Middle Eastern actors, and progressive states and alliances like Cartagena Dialogue. These actors consistently amplify the moral principles of solidarity and equity, framing loss and damage not merely as a technical or financial mechanism, but as an ethical imperative.

SIDS' championing of loss and damage norms bring a meaningful interpretation of norm permeability:

Loss and damage is such a painful issue because it took three decades of concerted effort by small island states and states with low-lying coastal areas to put this forward. And the reality is that these countries are already experiencing literally hundreds of billions of dollars in climate damages every year... (Interview with IP05)

The interviewee noted that institutionalising loss-and-damage norms required three decades of advocacy, revealing persistent structural power asymmetries that force marginalised states to seek recognition of existential threats. Amidst such political dynamics loss and damage has evolved from peripheral concern to central negotiating pillar through strategic framing as both moral imperative and economic necessity (Huq, Roberts and Fenton, 2013; Roberts and Huq, 2015).³⁴⁹ The statement's temporal framing ("already experiencing") underscores how loss-and-damage norms cluster with climate justice, human rights, and intergenerational equity. Concurrently, they're observed to construct strategic coalitions with both state actors (Bangladesh, LDCs, Latin American countries) and non-state entities to strengthen their negotiating position within UNFCCC frameworks.³⁵⁰

LDCs leverage their vulnerability to push for stronger climate action. They emphasise that the severe impacts of climate change (e.g., loss of arable land, displacement/climate migration, coastlines etc.) necessitate urgent measures. Albeit not a generality, the LDCs primarily are observed to champion loss and damage norms, climate justice norms, and the right to development norms. Anti-fossil fuel norms, human rights norms, equity norms (advocacies for Common but Differentiated Responsibilities) are seen to cluster with other global norms for strategic diffusion. They combine emotional persuasion with moral framing, strategic coalition

³⁴⁹ See *Chapter 4* (to see how norms are referenced) and *Chapter 5* (how climate movements influence on this norm has gained traction)

³⁵⁰ Interview with IP01, IP06, IP11, IP13, IP19

building, legal advocacy (guided by individual norm champions like Saleemul Huq), and direct participation to push their normative agenda. An interviewee notes how for the advocacy of loss and damage norms, dramatic visual representations: like speeches held in water (by Tuvalu—which is both a Small Island Developing State, and LDC) or images of submerged homes³⁵¹ were used as a moral authority (Packham, 2021).

Moreover, the advocacy for climate action extended both at domestic and international levels. An interviewee who is an advisor to alliances of SIDS notes:

I was just recently in Bangladesh, which shut down ten coal power stations because they genuinely believe that we must phase out fossil fuels. Now, I doubt that there will be too many developed states that would make the same kind of sacrifice. So, you know, there are all sorts of alliances, let's say, between small island states and a climate vulnerable country like Bangladesh, Mozambique and/or Costa Rica. And each of these countries, of course, has a very different set of circumstances to contend with. (Interview with IP17)

Although states within the LDCs operate with their own agency, they also collectively coordinate as part of the LDC Group—a formal negotiating bloc—advocating for norm clusters that align most closely with loss and damage norms. In addition, SIDS are observed to align with other climate-vulnerable countries such as Bangladesh, Mozambique, and Costa Rica, forming alliances that strengthen their capacity to act as norm champions.

Further, there were specific individual norm champions within LDCs, worth noting. Saleemul Huq³⁵² in the climate negotiation space draws attention to key strategies. Saleemul Huq emerged as a pivotal norm champion for loss and damage within UNFCCC negotiations through multiple strategic approaches. His effectiveness stemmed from a combination of personal experience,³⁵³ strategic discourse framing, and coalition building. Huq leveraged Bangladesh's climate vulnerability as empirical evidence, positioning the nation as a living laboratory of climate impacts to establish normative urgency.³⁵⁴ His strategy involved foresight and persistence—articulating loss and damage as an inevitable reality long before mainstream recognition, thereby normalising what was initially considered radical.³⁵⁵ A negotiator observed:

³⁵¹ Interview with IP01

³⁵² See also, *Chapter 4* where the thesis initially records about Saleemul Huq. Late Prof. Saleemul Huq OBE.

³⁵³ Interview with IP01

³⁵⁴ Interview with IP01, IP06, IP11, IP20

³⁵⁵ Interview with IP06

I've been involved with loss and damage negotiations for last fourteen years. So, when I was very young, then Saleem made me understand, "Look, [name], actually these guys [states that are not complying for climate action and ambition] will not take any responsibilities for mitigation, even not for adaptation financing. So, loss and damage would be the reality." [...] Now, after a decade, it is the reality. Not only the vulnerable communities from Bangladesh, but all over the world, including in the UK. Communities are facing vulnerabilities, loss, and damage. [Countries like] the UK and the US, have some capacities to handle these massive loss and damage, but unfortunately, developing countries, least developing countries like Bangladesh, we don't have that capacity. (Interview with IP06)

Huq employed a deliberate inside-outside strategy, strategically connecting external civil society movements with formal UNFCCC processes. This approach transformed loss and damage from an excluded concept into an operational agenda item at COP28.³⁵⁶ His coalition-building extended across both Global North and South stakeholders, with particularly strong advocacy through the V20 vulnerable nations group when Bangladesh held a chairmanship position.³⁵⁷ Huq's mentorship of younger negotiators from developing countries bolstered intergenerational equity norms aligning closely with loss and damage norms; fostering technical capacity to young negotiators.³⁵⁸ Throughout these efforts, Huq maintained moral authority by consistently highlighting the fundamental inequality between nations with capacity to address climate losses and those without such resources.³⁵⁹

An interviewee observed how Cartagena Dialogue recognises and champions loss and damage as a justice framing.

They [Cartagena Dialogue] also agree that there needs to be some level of support for loss and damage [...] that there should be some level of justice. You know the extent to which we can do that, a different issue, but there is that recognition and the transition away from fossil fuels. (Interview with IP11)

That is, Cartagena Dialogue though primarily focusing on mitigation and adaptation strategies, its stance on loss and damage has evolved over time. Denmark, a prominent member of the Cartagena Dialogue, has actively co-chaired discussions on loss and damage within the group (Udenrigsministerie, 2024). Denmark's engagement includes advocating for innovative funding sources and emphasising support for vulnerable countries such as Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS). This indicates that, at least among some members, the Cartagena Dialogue is not passive but rather supportive of advancing the loss

³⁵⁶ Interview with IP20

³⁵⁷ Interview with IP11

³⁵⁸ Interview with IP06, IP20

³⁵⁹ Interview with IP06

and damage agenda. However, the Cartagena Dialogue's overall position on loss and damage is nuanced. While it provides a platform for progressive discussions, the group does not have a unified stance, and positions may vary among its members. The Cartagena Dialogue serves as a space for countries to explore solutions beyond traditional groupings, which can include discussions on loss and damage, but it is not its primary focus (FOEN, 2025).

In the regions of Middle East and Africa, region, countries like the UAE and Egypt have emerged as norm champion by leveraging a leadership position. For instance, an interviewee noted that:

The UAE's [stand for] Loss and Damage Fund [...] was one of the crowning achievements of their presidency. (Interview with IP03)

The UAE played a pioneering role in structuring climate negotiations, effectively clustering norms related to loss and damage, and climate justice—their leadership is noteworthy in operationalising the Loss and Damage Fund, gavelling it to agreement on the first day of COP28 itself. Persuasion tactics employed by norm champions include leveraging high-level presidencies to set ambitious agendas, often through diplomatic relations, for furtherance of trade and commerce, among others. Egypt, with the COP27 presidency, has also used its Presidential leadership and diplomatic power to push for normative change by prioritising a global solidarity in accelerating the diffusion of loss and damage norms. By actively engaging in negotiations on finance, adaptation, and compliance,³⁶⁰ Egypt demonstrates how the states from Middle East and Africa can, on the one hand, be seen as obstructive due to their economic dependencies, yet on the other hand, contribute significantly to advancing the climate agenda through leadership and strategic persuasion, albeit there were concerns that their leadership in these matters were cajoled during their presidency and not necessarily out of their genuine interest for climate mitigation and adaptation.

Overall, the diffusion of loss and damage norms within the UNFCCC negotiations reflects a decades-long struggle. Empirical evidence shows how actors like SIDS, LDCs, progressive alliances such as the Cartagena Dialogue, and select Middle Eastern states leveraging COP presidencies have championed the global norm during COP24-28. While these champions differ in material capacities, geopolitical positioning, and strategic priorities, their collective efforts converge on framing loss and damage as both a moral imperative grounded in solidarity and equity, and a structural necessity for a just climate regime.

³⁶⁰ Interview with IP14

6.1.1.6 Global Earth Stewardship norms

Prominent norm champions for Global Earth Stewardship norms are notably by Small Island Developing states, Latin American countries, Mountainous countries, the European countries.

Owing to their unique vulnerabilities of loss of land, life and livelihood, SIDS champion Global Earth Stewardship norms by clustering it mainly with climate justice, loss and damage norms.³⁶¹

As for Latin American countries, an interview observed how shifting political leadership can change the normative stance, reflecting on Brazil's post-Bolsonaro transformative agency noting how political shifts can reinvigorate normative claims and allow these countries to reassert their commitment to environmental protection:

I was thinking of Brazil, for instance, like when Bolsonaro was there, was totally against it [climate action and ambition], and now it is coming up to even have COP 30. [...] So, and before that, you had Lula as well, who was, you know, very pro-protected forests. I've worked so much with Brazil on REDD+ for many, many years and they were really embracing it. And then [with Bolsonaro] you couldn't care less about the forest, and you know, cut it all down. And then Lula's back and the forest is back on the agenda [...] but it is the problem with democracy, right, with representative democracy and the unpredictability... it shifts all the time. (Interview with IP04)

It highlights how pursuits for climate action and ambition by countries in the region are often contested regional development models that have been historically characterised by a reliance on natural resource extraction (Svampa, 2019; Solorio, 2024). Such extractivism as a fulcrum to developmental objectives has evoked conflicts across the region (Lorenzo, 2020; Martinez-Alier, 2021). Climate change contributes to high rate of mortalities among environmental, land, and indigenous rights defenders, with 2022 recording an all-time high (Front Line Defenders, 2022). As such Latin American countries are commonly observed to champion global earth stewardship norms which cluster with human rights and climate justice norms. Despite diverse political systems across the region, these countries share institutional arrangements that systematically constrain meaningful civil society participation in climate policy formation processes (Solorio, 2024). Since these shared characteristics create distinctive regional patterns in climate governance that transcend individual national contexts while complicating norm implementation pathways, their advocacy at the UNFCCC COP negotiations is noteworthy, both as distinct parties to UNFCCC, as well as regional alliances and coalitions.

³⁶¹ Interview with IP13

The role of mountainous countries in championing the global norm of global earth stewardship was noted in during interview with negotiators.³⁶² At COP28, the voice of mountainous regions resonated more strongly than at any previous climate talks. UN Secretary-General António Guterres' visit to the Himalayas *en route* to UAE for COP28 spotlighted the region's vulnerability (UN News, 2023)—with projections showing a loss of 36 per cent of its glaciers by century's end even under 1.5°C warming. Nepal's (former) Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal convened a high-level event that generated commitments for urgent emission cuts, resource mobilisation, and targeted adaptation (Dhakal, 2024). In negotiations, coordination among Kyrgyz Republic, Bhutan, and Nepal—supported by downstream countries like Bangladesh—focused on upstream–downstream impacts (Dhakal, 2024).³⁶³ Engagements with the UAE presidency and formal UNFCCC submissions helped secure strong outcomes.³⁶⁴

The EU is observed to champion global earth stewardship through its advocacy for the principle of 'environmental integrity'³⁶⁵ which expresses a complex set of concepts that describe a healthy natural system that can support essential processes (Payne, 2017)—as such, the principle is explored to strengthen the cohesiveness of different norm clusters during climate negotiations. With the values it portrays, the behaviour it mandates and problems that need to solve (Winston, 2018)—it aligns to the value of the right to clean, healthy and sustainable environment (i.e., human rights norms) and principled idea of sufficiency. Such normative overlaps are observed and often occur organically in negotiations when norm champions advocate for certain norms, as they also tend to promote norms that cluster with them.

Collectively, these diverse norm champions demonstrate how advocacy for Global Earth Stewardship norms emerges from distinct vulnerabilities, political trajectories, and cultural traditions. While the substantive framing and allied norms vary across regions, their

³⁶² Interview with IP13, IP16

³⁶³ Here, "upstream" refers to areas located near the source of a river or watershed, while "downstream" refers to areas situated further along its course toward its mouth. In transboundary contexts and negotiations, upstream–downstream relations capture the interdependence of regions where environmental changes or management decisions in upstream areas directly affect water quantity, quality, and ecosystems downstream.

³⁶⁴ See Chapter 7 on specific instances of incorporation of "mountain" in the text(s).

³⁶⁵ There are differing views on what 'integrity' of environment constitutes—scholars understand in several ways: some describe it as the 'wild, untrammelled quality of nature and life's capacity to self-organise, regenerate, reproduce, sustain, adapt, develop, and evolve.' Others argue that 'entire ecosystems have intrinsic value due to their life-sustaining roles, cultural, spiritual, and scientific significance, and the services they provide.' Still, some emphasise 'a system's vigour, organisation, and resilience as core indicators of its integrity' (Pimentel, Westra and Noss, 2000). Payne helps portray a picture of environmental integrity—an idealised, untouched natural world—serene forests, crystal-clear rivers, and gleaming deserts; "If we knew a city before it was bombed, we will think of it as we knew it" (Payne, 2017, p. 42)

interventions in the UNFCCC negotiations illustrate a shared commitment to linking environmental protection with broader justice-oriented agendas. These cross-regional patterns not only strengthen the salience of Global Earth Stewardship norms but also expand their influence through strategic clustering with complementary norms, thereby enhancing their resilience in the negotiations.

6.1.1.7 Ecocide norms

Ecocide norms are contested within the UNFCCC COP negotiation space; hence the norm champions are observed to liaise strongly with the norm entrepreneurs to push from outside the negotiation halls. Empirical evidence shows how campaigns such as Stop Ecocide International strategise with negotiators insofar as they serve to raise awareness of the legal framing of ecocide, rather than to pursue a negotiated political settlement.³⁶⁶

Stop Ecocide is not a negotiated item. You can, for example, mention it in a conversation or make some reference to it, but I don't think this will happen in the near future because companies don't like to be criminalised for what they do. Nevertheless, the whole movement—the legal movements in courts around the world—is really, crucial, because it can create an accountability system, holding each other accountable through different processes. And they're having a kind of positive feedback loop. (Interview with IP13)

Although states in Europe champion ecocide, they do so by leveraging legal instruments, like the Environmental Crimes Directive, which “includes criminalisation of conduct comparable to ecocide”³⁶⁷ thereby clustering norms related to human rights, climate justice, ecocide, and environmental integrity. This clustering is reinforced by resolutions passed in EU parliamentary assemblies and Council of Europe, which support criminalising ecocide, further integrating environmental justice within a broader normative framework (Burke and Celermajer, 2021; Bozikovic, 2024; Stop Ecocide International, 2025). Such domestic push has resonance in the negotiations; but mostly not in the negotiation rooms. Yet, this normative push is met with resistance from powerful actors such as the US and The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) states, as well as some developing economies concerned about liability and domestic political constraints.³⁶⁸

On February 2024, Belgium became the first European country to criminalise ecocide in its own legal system, inserting the offence into a sweeping reform of its criminal code (Silva and

³⁶⁶ Interview with IP12

³⁶⁷ Interview with IP12

³⁶⁸ Interview with IP06

Croisant, 2024). On 9 September 2024, Vanuatu, Fiji and Samoa have formally proposed recognising ecocide under the International Criminal Court (ICC)'s jurisdiction (Harvey, 2024). With many countries in their domestic legislative frameworks inclining to recognise ecocide (Kaminski, 2023). Domestic legislative integration of ecocide norms serves as tangible demonstrations of normative commitment, enhancing states' credibility and authority to champion these norms in the UNFCCC; however, political sensitivity and contestation dominate in multilateral negotiation spaces.

6.1.1.8 Sufficiency

Empirical evidence reveals limited to no explicit norm championing of sufficiency within the UNFCCC COP negotiations. However, sufficiency as a principled idea emerges indirectly through its clustering with other, more prominent normative frameworks. Most notably, sufficiency aligns closely with Global Earth Stewardship norms as championed by European countries and the European Union, particularly in the advocacy for “environmental integrity” and sustainable consumption patterns as integral to long-term climate stability.³⁶⁹ This alignment is reinforced when sufficiency is framed in conjunction with climate justice norms, especially in calls to address disproportionate consumption of wealth and resources. Furthermore, sufficiency aligns with anti-fossil fuel norms, wherein advocacy extends beyond the phasing down or phasing out of production to addressing the structural persistence of fossil-fuel-dependent economic models and unsustainable consumption patterns. Accountability is pursued through strategies such as naming and shaming, as well as the exertion of peer pressure by states positioning themselves as responsible actors (see Turner *et al.*, 2010; Petrova, 2019). In this way, sufficiency acquires normative traction not through direct, standalone championing, but via an organic evolution in which its principles are embedded within broader normative clusters, enabling its partial diffusion into negotiation discourse while avoiding the contestation that often accompanies more explicitly transformative demands.

6.2 Norm Antipreneurs

Norm antipreneurs are those who defend the status quo (Bloomfield, 2016), thus positing contestation to the efforts of norm champions and entrepreneurs.³⁷⁰ They actively prevent norm modification (or norm change), even by utilising counter-frames of moral arguments and of

³⁶⁹ See, *Chapter 6: Norm Champions and Norm Antipreneurs - Section 6.1.1.6 Global Earth Stewardship norms*

³⁷⁰ See, the literature around “norm antipreneurs” in *Chapter 3 Literature: Section 3.2*.

equity framing, that seek to rationalise contested practices (Seidman, 2015, p. 1033; Jamieson, 2017; Green, 2018a).

6.2.1 Identifying Norm Antipreneurs

This section identifies who the norm antipreneurs are in the UNFCCC COP negotiations. That said, identifying norm antipreneurs has its complexity: the section offers a critical yet arguably balanced account that simultaneously acknowledge the multiplicity of motivations, constraints, and strategic choices shaping actors' roles (especially by States exercising their sovereignty)—recognising that resistance to norm change is not always rooted in malice or denial, but often in structural dependencies, political trade-offs, or competing interpretations of justice and equity. As such, this section, attempts to identify the main actors who have functioned as norm antipreneurs within climate negotiations. By systematically analysing the interview data, I mapped the eight identified norms and the actors who emerged as prominent norm antipreneurs. Consequently, this section presents a nuanced yet discernible pattern of state actors and corporations/lobbyists who served as norm antipreneurs during the period spanning COP24 to COP28.³⁷¹

6.2.1.1 Anti-Fossil Fuel Norms

Here, I draw two observations which norm antipreneurs for anti-fossil fuel norms use: (1) national interests (state actors); (2) lobbying (non-state actors).

6.2.1.1.1 National Interests

This analysis identifies three principal dimensions through which states/parties act as norm antipreneurs to anti-fossil fuel norms: (1) economic dependence; (2) political–institutional constraints; and (3) equity and developmental claims. While these dimensions are analytically distinct, in practice they frequently evolve, intersect, and change/transform over time. Shifts in domestic political leadership, economic priorities, and international alignments can alter a party's climate policies and, consequently, its positioning within UNFCCC COP negotiations.

6.2.1.1.1.1 Economic Dependence

Firstly, there are states whose economies rely heavily on fossil fuel extraction, export, or related industries (e.g., OPEC members, petro-states like Saudi Arabia, UAE, Russia; coal-heavy economies like Poland, the US etc) fear direct economic harm from fossil fuel phase-out commitments. States whose economies are heavily dependent on fossil fuel production or

³⁷¹ See *Chapter 3 Methodology*; the thesis focuses on the timeframe COP24-28

exports are often the primary norm antipreneurs in international climate negotiation processes. They consistently oppose emerging anti-fossil-fuel norms or principles that support the same. An interviewee explained:

[...] that includes Norway, Canada, the United States, Russia, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, other countries in the Middle East, other members of the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC): all those countries have served as roadblocks to climate action. They have served to undermine the negotiations. (Interview with IP05)

These countries use their significant economic weight and political clout to water down or block proposals that would compel strong action against fossil fuel extraction and use. For example, fossil fuel-dependent states frequently demand that climate negotiations conform strictly to pre-approved national mandates,³⁷² limiting negotiators' flexibility³⁷³ and ensuring alignment with broader geopolitical or trade-related interests.³⁷⁴ Such measures sustain the status quo and reflects "regime resistance"—a strategic form of norm contestation where states seek to delay or deflect the institutionalisation of new global environmental norms under the guise of legal or diplomatic consistency (Geels, 2014, p. 21; Ford and Newell, 2021, p. 1; Obergassel *et al.*, 2025). This practice not only constrains a negotiation room for compromise but also reflects how domestic economic structures and transnational alliances (such as OPEC or free trade blocs) shape and often restrict negotiators' positions at the international level. Here a mention on how free trade blocs operate its dynamics in negotiations warrants attention: a free trade bloc (or free trade area) is a group of countries that agree to reduce or eliminate barriers to trade—such as tariffs, quotas, and import/export restrictions—on goods and services traded between them. Trade blocs are not just economic instruments; they serve as political communities indicating definite economic-political trajectories that mutually reinforce each other: further significantly influencing multilateral climate governance. Their relevance in climate negotiations is heightened when coalitions formed within trade blocs often translate into interests that shape negotiating groups, often powerful states within the trade bloc dictating and driving the terms of other states too, from strong climate commitments.³⁷⁵

³⁷² Interview with IP20

³⁷³ Interview with IP13, IP14

³⁷⁴ Interview with IP18

³⁷⁵ Note that the dynamic can also work in reverse, whereby economically powerful states within a trade bloc that adopt ambitious climate policies—such as the European Union through its Green Deal and/or Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism—can arguably exert upward pressure on other member or partner states within a trade bloc, thereby facilitating the diffusion of stronger climate norms and exemplifying regional climate leadership.

Further, because the UNFCCC operates by consensus, a state acting as a norm antipreneur may exercise an effective blockage over ambitious language: a dynamic frequently exploited by oil-rich countries to stall progress (Depledge, Pryck and Roberts, 2023). An interviewee notes:

[...] all it takes is one state, and there are several that are petro-states, that oppose strong language on phasing out fossil fuels. (Interview with IP03)

Analysts have criticised the consensus rule as a “recipe for paralysis” that enables a “tiny minority of obstructers” to hold up agreements (Depledge, Pryck and Roberts, 2023, p. 15). Empirical events from recent climate summits illustrate these dynamics. At COP28 in UAE, India and China intervened at the last minute to weaken a key norm about coal, (Friedman, Plumer and Nereim, 2023). Iran and Russia have advocated for language safeguarding natural gas interests, while oil-dependent nations like Iraq have expressed concerns that fossil fuel phase-outs could severely damage economies reliant on hydrocarbon revenues, demanding increased financial assistance from developed countries (Friedman, Plumer and Nereim, 2023).

There were reports that the COP24 was sponsored by coal companies (Christian Aid, 2018). The setting foreshadowed tensions between a fossil-fuel-oriented host and the urgent calls for climate action. At the opening plenary, Polish President Andrzej Duda controversially stated “there is no plan to fully give up on coal” even as the talks aimed to limit warming to 1.5–2°C (Davies, 2019). At COP28 Saudi Arabia have objected to a provision, endorsed by at least 118 countries, aimed at tripling global renewable energy capacity by 2030; *The New York Times* records that tactics including deliberately delaying provisions, orchestrating walkouts during side negotiations, and declining to engage with negotiators advocating for fossil fuel elimination (Friedman, Plumer and Nereim, 2023).

Many petrostates and developing countries reliant on fossil revenue insist that any fossil fuel phase-out be “just and equitable”—essentially demanding that wealthy nations act first and provide compensation or support for the transition. Literatures have conflicting views on whether this is an active *blocking* or a political stand for respective countries’ development and prioritising the need to pull large populations from poverty and inequality (see Dubash et al., 2018; Sengupta, 2019). While concerns are legitimate, norm antipreneurs often use the same frames which are used by norm entrepreneurs, namely moral principles of equity, and justice’.³⁷⁶

³⁷⁶ See, *Chapter 4: Global Norms and International Climate Negotiations – Section 4.1 Broader Normativity*

In such context, it is worthwhile to note how an interviewee mentioned that albeit just transition and equity frames have their importance, mitigation ought not to be undermined:

COP 28 in Dubai was very significant because, on the one hand, it was being held in the United Arab Emirates, which is a petrostate. The COP itself was presided over by the CEO of the National Oil Company, which is increasing fossil fuel production by 43 per cent between now and the year 2030. The next COP 29 will be in Baku, Azerbaijan, yet another petrostate. So, we fall into the question of greenwashing and vague allusions to a transition to green energy, which was the agreed text after very vigorous debate and controversy. (Interview with IP17)

Here, the interviewee brought out the paradox of the petrostate presidencies which led the UNFCCC COPs at COP27, 28 and 29 [when the interviews were conducted, COP29 had not yet convened]. The urgency of anti-fossil fuel norms was watered down by greenwashing. The interviewee opined how the UAE used its leadership role in COP presidency and its national oil companies to influence the negotiation process, often channelling the agenda toward less ambitious language.³⁷⁷

6.2.1.1.2 Political–Institutional Constraints

Secondly, some states embody political–institutional constraints. Such constraints encompass domestic political cycles, electoral considerations, and legal barriers, all of which continuously shape negotiators' positions—even under administrations that are rhetorically committed to climate action. These factors operate as structural filters, mediating the translation of international commitments into negotiating mandates. The case of the United States, as evidenced through interview data, illustrates this dynamic. Prior to the return of the Trump administration in 2025, an interviewee, who had served as a U.S. negotiator, observed:

I think that the oil companies probably do consider the Biden administration an enemy. Then, yet you know we're doing a lot to promote technologies that they could use, in order to continue with some fossil fuel use, in a way that's consistent with net zero. But you know, part of the reason for doing that is that, you know, if we just said, OK, well, **** you, we would multiply the enemies of this agenda by quite a lot, so that's not useful to us. But you know, we don't expect industry to vote for us in the same way that we need the youth to vote for us. (Interview with IP18)

³⁷⁷ See, *Chapter 6 Section 6.1.2.5 Middle Eastern Countries*, for a critical analysis of the nuanced role of United Arab Emirates, which simultaneously acted as a norm champion on Loss and Damage and, in its role as COP28 Presidency, played a complex part in advancing ambitious language supportive of anti-fossil fuel norms.

The United States' climate policy has fluctuated significantly across presidential administrations.³⁷⁸ The Trump administration (2017–2021) reversed many of climate positive policies—formally withdrawing from the Paris Agreement in 2020 and rolling back federal climate regulations (see [Luna, 2022](#)). President Joe Biden (2021–2025) rejoined the Paris Agreement on his first day in office, pledged net-zero emissions by 2050, and introduced the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) of 2022 to accelerate clean energy investments (see [Luna, 2022](#)). However, the return of the Trump administration in 2025 marked a renewed rollback of federal climate initiatives, withdrawal from global cooperation frameworks, and a resurgence of fossil fuel prioritisation—reasserting norm-antipreneur positions on the global stage (e.g. questioning financial contributions and weakening emissions pledges). This oscillation illustrates how partisan politics significantly shape US climate leadership and norm diffusion in international negotiations. Even so, the interviewee admitted how the administration chose a pragmatic, incremental approach rather than an aggressive anti-fossil fuel stance, in order not to “multiply the enemies”³⁷⁹ of climate action domestically. A hardline stance would provoke backlash from industry and consumers, thus “promoting technologies they could use [...] to continue some fossil fuel use in a way consistent with net zero”³⁸⁰ This strategy of gradual transition (e.g. supporting carbon capture, hydrogen, efficiency improvements) reflects an attempt to balance normative ambition with political realism. The interviewee stressed that the US government still prioritised keeping the “environmental vote”³⁸¹ even if it meant upsetting industry to some degree (note: this priority was during the time the interview was conducted i.e., 2023-2024). Also suggesting that compliance with climate goals has often been driven more by political calculus than by genuine commitment to climate justice or preventing catastrophic impacts such as rising sea levels. The interviewee further emphasised the domestic political conflict in the US:

We recently introduced very strict standards [...] But now there is a huge backlash in the US, including in at least one critical swing state. It is possible that, looking back

³⁷⁸ Climate policy across presidential administration until 2018: Although the U.S. formerly announced its intention not to ratify the Kyoto Protocol, under President George W. Bush (2001–2009), the administration rejected the Kyoto Protocol and the Marrakesh Accords, which provided detailed rules for the implementation of the Kyoto Protocol, citing economic concerns and lack of developing country commitments (Fletcher and Parker, 2007). President Barack Obama (2009–2017) re-engaged with multilateral climate diplomacy, contributing to the Paris Agreement and launching domestic initiatives, clearly championing global norms for climate action and ambition.³⁷⁸

³⁷⁹ Interview with IP18

³⁸⁰ Interview with IP18

³⁸¹ Interview with IP18

after the election, we might say that our climate policies contributed to losing a state like Pennsylvania, which has a significant natural gas industry. Then the question becomes: was it worth it? That's the nature of politics. These issues don't affect me directly in my role, at least not much in the negotiations. But I think we're generally very responsive to NGO outreach. We always take their concerns seriously. We may not always follow through on everything, but we do consider their input carefully. (Interview with IP18)

Motives behind the blocking of certain norms and their diffusion in climate negotiations stems from the systemic patterns of domestic politics. For instance, legal and electoral concerns have forced negotiators to relax ambitious proposals.³⁸² Moreover, rather than electoral constraints, emergence of legal feasibility as the primary limit on climate policy ambition, is noteworthy. The interview was conducted in 2024; the US has had a new government since then—which withdrew from the Paris Agreement (taking effect from 2026) (Haskett, 2025). Most of the climate-related policies have been changed or revoked since the Republicans have come to power in 2025. For instance, the Supreme Court's elimination of Chevron deference³⁸³ in *Loper Bright Enterprises v. Raimondo*³⁸⁴ have created a legal chokepoint that systematically constrains federal climate action regardless of democratic support or scientific necessity.

6.2.1.1.3 Equity and Developmental Claims

Finally, equity and developmental claims make parties norm antipreneurs. It is worth noting how contention surrounding fossil fuel phase-out/down stems from concerns raised by states like India and China, who maintain that mandating such transitions without adequate climate finance or reparations represents a form of injustice (see Gupta and Wong, 2014; Dubash, 2019; Peeters, Diependaele and Sterckx, 2019; Sengupta, 2019; Stanway, 2023). For instance, India occupies a unique climate position: housing significant climate-vulnerable populations while functioning as both a minor historical emitter and potentially major future contributor despite low per-capita emissions and socio-economic inequalities (see Dubash *et al.*, 2018; Conceição *et al.*, 2019; Skah, 2020; He, Li and Zhang, 2022). Such developing states do not exhibit

³⁸² Interview with IP18

³⁸³ In *Loper Bright Enterprises v. Raimondo*, 603 U.S. 369 (2024), the Supreme Court overturned the landmark *Chevron U.S.A., Inc. v. Natural Resources Defense Council, Inc.*, 467 U.S. 837 (1984) decision, which had guided federal regulatory practice for over four decades. The *Chevron* doctrine had allowed expert agencies, like the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), significant discretion in interpreting ambiguous statutes, enabling civil servants to develop regulations safeguarding public health from threats such as air and water pollution. By dismantling this principle—commonly referred to as “Chevron deference”—the Court significantly curtailed regulatory authority, effectively favouring industry interests over public protections (Tavenor, 2024).

³⁸⁴ *Loper Bright Enterprises v. Raimondo*, 603 U.S. 369 (2024)

categorical indifference to fossil fuel phase-out/down initiatives *per se*—rendering it analytically problematic to characterise them as norm antipreneurs³⁸⁵ to anti-fossil fuel norms, particularly given their substantial investments in renewable energy infrastructure while simultaneously managing the complex balance between economic growth imperatives and existing fossil fuel dependencies (Tharoor, 2021). The difficulties to align with an enthusiastic climate ambition beyond what's needed as progression (see Voigt, 2023), is best expressed as Tharoor puts it:

But, as recently as 2015, at least a quarter of India's population couldn't take for granted what almost everyone in the developed world can: to flick a switch on a wall and be bathed with light. (Tharoor, 2021)

As such, these countries' geopolitical positionality compels them to negotiate through a domestic policy framework that advances climate action exclusively within the parameters of common but differentiated responsibilities, thereby conditioning their climate commitments on principles of equity. From their perspective, international climate negotiations transcend mere environmental diplomacy and constitute a major multilateral economic agreement with profound implications (Mintzer and Leonard, 1994; Sengupta, 2019). The distribution of costs and benefits embedded within these frameworks has the potential to significantly change the economic goal(s) of respective states—making financial support a matter of equity rather than charity in the climate transition discourse (Sengupta, 2019). In such a context, development is a delicate notion amidst climate crises where efforts to phase down/out fossil fuels must be balanced with the socio-economic imperative to alleviate poverty and promote development.

A negotiator from Egypt, stressed their case for development even as they pioneer climate action:

So the issue of justice and fairness and development-focus and poverty eradication is being lost for the sake of saving the climate [...] we have shifted from a climate-sensitive regime to a climate-responsible regime. I have even seen it in Africa that some of the development partners and the development institutions are reluctant or even refusing to fund road projects in African countries who really are in need of those roads because [roads] are asphalt-based, and asphalt is a byproduct of fossil fuel. We're just talking about climate without looking at the bigger picture. (Interview with IP12)

There is normative contestation even within the Party positions of norm antipreneurs when countries like Egypt, China, and India are urged to prioritise energy transition, while states like the United States—whose second withdrawal from the Paris Agreement in 2025 signalled a

³⁸⁵ See further discussions to this in *Chapter 6: Norm Champions and Norm Antipreneurs*

renewed focus on fossil fuel expansion: reprioritising 'energy addition' over 'energy transition' (Beardsworth, 2025). An interviewee expressed as to why the negotiations with respect to the diffusion of anti-fossil fuel norms remains contested: noting how carbon budget needs to be weighed along with the ambition required for mitigation.

Now, if we really want to talk about fairness and justice, we should be discussing our own [carbon] budget—not just mitigation. How much carbon space remains to stay within 1.5°C or 2°C, how much has already been consumed, and by whom? How do we distribute the remaining space fairly among countries? But no one wants to discuss carbon budgets, because developed countries have already used up about 550 gigatons of the 1,000-gigaton budget—by 1997 or 2000. Now we're expected to work within the remaining 450 or 350 gigatons—with no clear rationale—and still do more as developing countries. That limits our development space. Even if we aim to develop without emissions, we're only offered loans: loans we have to repay with interest. No one is supporting our recovery, not even in the context of loss and damage. (Interview with IP14)

The interviewee critiques the failure of developed countries to uphold the Paris Agreement's equity principle by offering inadequate and debt-based climate finance to the developing and least developed countries (see OECD, 2024; OXFAM, 2024). It underscores the moral and structural inequities in the implementation as well as expected ambition in the negotiations of anti-fossil fuel norms—which, though framed as morally imperative, diplomatically sideline historical emissions, unequal carbon consumption, and developmental needs. By highlighting the burden of intergenerational debt and constrained development space, the negotiator reflects broader normative contestations—particularly from developing states—against a fossil fuel transition imposed without reparative finance and thus stresses the need for an equity-based approach to climate responsibility, rooted in just carbon budget allocation and non-extractive support. In such a scenario, it is helpful to note, that phase-out of fossil fuels presents a dual policy challenge: transformation of affected industries and securing socio-economic resilience in regions heavily reliant on fossil fuel-based economies (Nacke, Cherp and Jewell, 2022)—where states broker trust for just transition. As, Beardsworth, (2021) highlights, states under a unified energy vision may thus, uniquely coordinate monetary, fiscal, industrial and employment policies to advance climate strategies alongside social justice concerns, to form the backbone of a broader societal initiative—establishing the essential links to international solidarity and collaboration among state and non-state actors.

The developing world's political and economic vulnerabilities have fractured G77's collective negotiating strength.³⁸⁶ The previously unified G77 + China bloc (134 countries) has fragmented into competing groups like BASIC, LDCs, and ALBA, each pursuing distinct interests that undermine unified bargaining power. This fragmentation, evident during the 2009 Copenhagen and 2010 Cancun negotiations, reflects how national economic priorities have weakened developing nations' collective influence on global climate policy. This phenomenon is particularly observable throughout the COP24-28 period, which constitutes the primary temporal focus of this thesis. The BASIC group (Brazil, South Africa, India, China) and the broader Like-Minded Developing Countries (LMDC) coalition represent large emerging economies, and they typically champion norms of equity, developmental rights, and differentiation between North and South. Although this is viewed as "blocking" agendas at times, a nuanced understanding of the norms they champion will be instrumental. Their stance is that developed countries, having contributed the bulk of historical emissions, must take the lead on mitigation and finance, while developing countries retain more flexibility to grow. BASIC was formed in the late 2000s precisely to push back against pressures on emerging economies to limit their emissions, and it continues to emphasise "the issues of equity and access to carbon space for development" (Gupta, 2021). Hence BASIC and LMDC clearly comes as a norm antipreneur for anti-fossil fuel norms, and often even to human rights norms, however a champion to loss and damage, intergenerational equity, and right to a clean healthy and sustainable environment. In *prima facie*, norms that align with climate justice principles are championed by BASIC and LMDC—and often amplified by climate movements. For instance, climate justice advocates frequently point out that the US and EU have together emitted nearly half of historical CO₂ and call for them to deliver greater emissions cuts and finance – essentially amplifying BASIC's argument (Gupta, 2021). Thus, climate movements interact with BASIC/LMDC norms in a nuanced way: they reinforce calls for equity and financial support—often siding with these blocs in demanding that richer countries ramp up action consistent with their historical emissions—but they also push back on any norm of minimal responsibility for emerging economies. The result is pressure on BASIC/LMDC to evolve. Notably, all BASIC countries except India did eventually declare mid-century or soon-

³⁸⁶ Group of 77 (G-77) established in 1964 during the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) has subsequently expanded its operations throughout the broader United Nations system. G-77 comprise of 133 member states and it operates under a rotational annual chairmanship system, whereby a designated member state (i.e., a party) assumes leadership responsibilities. It is observed how China strategically aligns itself with the coalition during negotiations.

after net-zero goals (China 2060, Brazil and South Africa 2050), moves that came amid both diplomatic cajoling and public demand for greater ambition. When it comes to conflicts between different actors, in the UNFCCC COP negotiations, usually, the parties/actors that have more “bargaining power”³⁸⁷ are observed to push discourses forward, whether normative or not.³⁸⁸ Here, the negotiator observed how unequal representation and negotiating capacity—particularly for least developed countries—continue to distort a level playing field, suggesting that norm diffusion remains vulnerable to structural imbalances. The durability of emerging norms, such as climate justice, anti-fossil fuel norms, human rights norms and global earth stewardship norms, will depend heavily on the resilience of movements which may aid in redressing these persistent asymmetries in multilateral climate diplomacy.

6.2.1.1 Lobbying by Corporations, Industry and other Non-State Actors

As opposed to just state actors, non-state actors—particularly fossil fuel corporations and industry lobbyists also function as potent norm antipreneurs in climate governance. Major oil and gas companies such as ExxonMobil, Chevron, Shell, and British Petroleum (BP) work behind the scenes (and sometimes openly) to counter normative proposals that would force a transition away from fossil fuels. These companies, along with industry trade associations, engage in well-funded lobbying efforts that target the UNFCCC negotiations and domestic policymakers alike. They frequently participate in COPs by sending sizable delegations (sometimes embedded within country delegations or as observers) and by sponsoring side events, all with the aim of shaping the discourse on climate solutions. Notably, at COP28, fossil fuel industry presence reached unprecedented levels: over 2,400 fossil fuel lobbyists were registered to attend – nearly four times the number in the previous year – outnumbering the delegation of any single country except the host (UAE) itself (Igini, 2023; Lakhani, 2023b). This “staggering influx” of industry representatives sparked widespread concern that corporate interests were exerting undue influence on the talks (Igini, 2023). The most prominent among the ten largest industry-affiliated delegations at the negotiations was the Geneva-based International Emissions Trading Association (IETA), which registered 116 participants (KBPO, 2023). This delegation included representatives from major fossil fuel corporations such as Royal Dutch Shell, TotalEnergies, and Equinor—the latter being a state-owned energy company based in Norway. Notably, several governments included representatives from fossil fuel companies within their official country delegations. France, for instance, incorporated

³⁸⁷ Interview with IP01

³⁸⁸ Interview with IP01

executives from TotalEnergies and Électricité de France (EDF), while Italy included personnel from the state-controlled oil and gas company Eni SpA. The European Union also registered employees of British Petroleum (BP), Eni SpA, and ExxonMobil under its delegation (KBPO, 2023).

Hence, norm antipreneurs from the industry advance their agenda through both economic arguments and normative narratives. A common tactic is emphasising the short-term economic costs or feasibility challenges of proposed climate measures, while downplaying long-term benefits. For example, corporate lobbies argue that phasing out coal or mandating new clean technology would cause massive job losses and economic disadvantage.³⁸⁹ They warn of factory closures, spikes in energy prices, or threats to energy security if fossil fuels are rapidly curtailed.³⁹⁰ This sector, long tied to the internal combustion engine, has resisted shifts to electric vehicles by lobbying against stricter emissions standards and EV mandates, invoking the potential economic disruption to justify a slower transition.

In the climate negotiations context, fossil fuel companies and allied industries often propose weaker, incremental approaches: for instance, instead of a binding fossil fuel phase-out, they champion voluntary efficiency improvements, carbon capture and storage (CCS) technologies, or ‘lower-carbon’ fossil fuels (like gas as a bridge fuel). These are innovative strategies, however, the resistance to the language of fossil fuel ‘phase out’ suggests how industries manipulate the negotiations by pointing to an attractive market for renewables that are self-regulated and capitalistic. These positions allow them to appear engaged in solutions while effectively delaying any commitment to leave hydrocarbons unburned (Lamb, 2020).

Beyond framing arguments, corporate norm antipreneurs employ direct strategies to influence outcomes. They use counter-campaigns to sway public opinion and political leaders—for instance, promoting the idea that oil and gas development is morally justified to alleviate energy poverty or that natural gas is a clean fuel necessary for development. Such moral reframing is intended to neutralise the stigma that climate advocates seek to attach to fossil fuel (Seidman, 2015).

Additionally, fossil fuel industries coordinate closely with sympathetic governments inside the negotiations. They form alliances and sponsor influential think tanks and front groups that echo

³⁸⁹ Interview with IP01

³⁹⁰ Interview with IP01

their talking points in UNFCCC discussions and media coverage. They're observed to invoke "conspiracy theories,"³⁹¹ suggesting that calls for transformative change are driven by hidden agendas rather than objective environmental concerns, which serves to undermine the legitimacy of progressive proposals. Interviewees suggested that the fossil lobby often operates with "different coats, different hats"³⁹²—in other words, the same core interests might speak through multiple voices (consultants, trade groups, even delegates from friendly states), creating an impression of broader support for their position than actually exists. Such coordination leads observers to perceive the fossil fuel lobby as a monolithic force deliberately steering negotiations to serve its interests even if specific identities are obscured.

The aviation sector is analysed as a norm antipreneur, if not regulated domestically and transnationally for climate ambition. As opposed to being a norm antipreneur, the aviation sector has its interconnected and intersecting priorities for safety and security of passengers, businesses, and states—which makes it in an arguably difficult position, as an antipreneur in *prima facie*, lest domestic political priorities economically channel research for efficient aviation methods.³⁹³ The interviewee observed the need for financing, and the role of NGOs and climate movements to redirect normative discourses for more innovation rather than demand reduction (where it is not possible, for development reasons):

NGOs are advocating for the right thing—clean energy—and that push is essential. It has the potential to be a real game changer. In aviation, [...] the real issue is financing. [...] But mobilising the scale of investment needed—trillions—is incredibly difficult, especially in a time of geopolitical instability. Still, the NGOs' insistence on phasing out fossil fuels and advancing clean alternatives is helping reshape the conversation. Their advocacy aligns with aviation's own spirit of innovation. This is a technology-driven sector: we love to fly, and we love developing new solutions. [...] So with the right investments and continued NGO pressure, aviation could shift from being seen as part of the climate problem to becoming part of the solution. (Interview with IP10)

The interviewee suggests that aviation, unlike overt norm antipreneurs (e.g., certain fossil fuel states), does not primarily resist climate norms to preserve the status quo. This makes it a reluctant actor in climate governance: not overtly oppositional, but slowed by its institutional architecture, lack of decarbonisation readiness, and needed finance for innovation. As such, its resistance is more a product of institutional inertia and regulatory fragmentation than ideological opposition—thus positioning as a 'creative resistor' according to literature

³⁹¹ Interview with IP01

³⁹² Interview with IP01

³⁹³ Interview with IP10

(Bloomfield, 2016, p. 310). The interviewee implied that without resolving structural financial inequities, norm compliance will remain fragmented or aspirational.

Norm antpreneurs are also observed to use economic argumentation by emphasising short-term costs over long-term benefits; for example, they warn that transitioning from coal in steel production to electric furnaces could result in the loss of 2,500 jobs (as happened in Port Talbot; the interviewee stressed how the government only spoke of the unemployment and not of its responsibility to just transition)³⁹⁴ thereby portraying ambitious measures as threats to economic stability. In addition, they enforce strict government briefing, compelling negotiators to adhere exclusively to pre-approved positions and thus sidelining any innovative or transformative ideas introduced by civil society.³⁹⁵ Fossil fuel-dependent states³⁹⁶ and major oil companies, such as the industry giant ExxonMobil, further bolster these efforts through coordinated lobbying and alliance building to present a united front that resists calls for rapid fossil fuel phase-outs.

6.2.1.2 Climate Justice Norms

Climate justice norms face systematic opposition from major developed economies that has fundamentally undermine moral principles of equity in international climate negotiations. This is evidenced and noted as below:

But one thing that has been pushed back continuously by developed countries is CBDR [Common But Differentiated Responsibilities] and bringing forward issues of just transition, this has been pushed back by the US and the EU continuously, which is the idea of justice and climate justice in its core. [...] So systemically, CBDR has been attacked, equity has been attacked, the right to development has been attacked. [...] So what we are losing in the whole process is the principles that we have agreed to in the Paris Agreement. (Interview with IP14)

This opposition targets the conceptual foundation of climate justice itself, effectively dismantling years of established equity frameworks, such as Common But Differentiated Responsibilities, which have often been sustained by climate movements and transnational advocacy networks.³⁹⁷ When parties divert attention to China as "the big elephant in the room"³⁹⁸—further erodes justice considerations, creating a diversionary tactic where "the issue

³⁹⁴ Interview with IP01

³⁹⁵ Interview with IP01

³⁹⁶ Interview with IP05

³⁹⁷ Interview with IP04

³⁹⁸ Interview with IP14

of justice and equity is being killed totally"³⁹⁹—because attention to one major emitter obscures the responsibilities of other significant actors. This dynamic exploit the consensus-based negotiation process, which has inherent limitations that allow persistent opposition from major powers to block justice-oriented outcomes. The systematic nature of this opposition suggests a coordinated effort to prevent the institutionalisation of climate justice norms and the persistent advocacy around it—that would establish binding equity obligations or liability frameworks for developed nations, effectively hollowing out the normative foundation for just climate action.

Another pushback from the industry and corporation is the legal ways they employ to block civil society organisations' demand for climate action often rooted in climate justice. One of the most prominent ways recorded is the Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPP) cases—often specifically targeting NGOs (Setzer and Higham, 2024). Research shows a continued rise in SLAPPs across Europe, identifying 1,049 cases between 2010 and 2023 (Levantesi, 2024). These lawsuits span a wide range of issues, with environmental advocacy emerging as the second most common target, following cases related to corruption. SLAPPs were recorded in 41 European countries, including Italy, Greece, the Netherlands, Poland, the United Kingdom, and Ukraine (Levantesi, 2024). On a global scale, powerful corporate actors—particularly in the fossil fuel and industrial agriculture sectors—have increasingly pursued legal action against individuals and organisations working to promote environmental and climate accountability, demanding climate justice (see Hilson, 2016; Levantesi, 2024; The Daphne Caruana Galizia Foundation and CASE, 2024).

Overall, in and around the UNFCCC COP negotiations, a deliberate and multi-layered resistance to climate justice norms remains—combining state-level opposition from major developed economies, diversionary tactics that shift responsibility onto selected actors, and industry-driven legal strategies aimed at silencing civil society advocacy. This sustained pushback has not only diluted the operational meaning of equity in climate negotiations but also weakened the strategic pathways for norm permeation and advocacy by climate movements.

6.2.1.3 Intergenerational Equity Norms

Norm antipreneurs of Intergenerational equity norms are not easily identifiable. The common regard for young people and children is upheld by most to all parties in the UNFCCC COP

³⁹⁹ Interview with IP14

negotiations. The resistance, however, is evident in the instrumentalisation of young people and the subtle absence of generational coordination.

Youth momentum in the negotiation space often faces criticism, as countries tend to use young people merely as tokens rather than recognising them as a “meaningful voice”.⁴⁰⁰ For instance, Saudi Arabia’s negotiators were noted to be young:

The Saudi also is very young. All of them are having some good kind of expertise and they are very good in negotiations. So now countries and governments are more focusing to include youth and making them the one to lead. (Interview with IP15)

However, according to reports by *The New York Times*, diplomatic officials and observers identified Saudi Arabia as the main obstacle to consensus at COP28, where countries were debating whether to include language calling for a phase-out of fossil fuels (Friedman, Plumer and Nereim, 2023; Niranjan and Taylor, 2024). An interviewee stressed the same.⁴⁰¹ This juxtaposition illustrates a form of norm antipreneurship: while the visible presence of youth signals alignment with the principle of intergenerational equity, their deployment in defending positions resistant to ambitious climate action effectively works to block the operationalisation of this norm. Such dynamics raise questions regarding the potential political manipulation of young negotiators, although this critique warrants scrutiny given that states fundamentally operate to advance national interests rather than empowering individual agency within delegations.

Likewise, observing on tokenism, a negotiator offered a critical perspective on the COP27 introduction of the Youth Envoy role and COP28’s appointment of the Youth Climate Champion—a high-level position within the COP Presidency’s senior leadership, supported by an office tasked with enhancing youth inclusion across COP processes. The concern expressed was that these appointments albeit well-conceived, risk functioning as tokenistic gestures i.e., a symbolic ‘tick-the-box’ exercise rather than effecting substantive procedural or structural reforms that would meaningfully expand youth decision-making power within the UNFCCC COP framework:

Right now, the climate crisis is one of the largest and most complex challenges we face, and it needs to be addressed urgently. But when we talk about young people—almost 4 billion of us—how can the “face” of all youth be represented by just one person? If we are not able to build a movement around that representation, it will not resonate with everyone. One person simply doesn’t have the time in a day to push for everything

⁴⁰⁰ Interview with IP01

⁴⁰¹ Interview with IP18

that needs to be pushed. It has to be a collective effort. For me, that's a significant drawback. That said, I think the idea of having a climate champion is beautiful. We are starting to institutionalise certain roles for young people, but we need to think carefully about how we implement them. (Interview with IP20)

The negotiator observed how by concentrating youth representation into one symbolic figurehead, the UNFCCC system risks treating youth inclusion as a procedural requirement already “fulfilled,” rather than as an ongoing need for broader and more diverse participation in negotiations. This reduction of youth voice(s) to a single point of representation satisfies the optics of inclusivity while limiting the actual channels through which young negotiators can influence agenda-setting, text drafting, and coalition strategies.

In addition, another negotiator from a Small Island Developing State noted—while emphasising that it was not her own experience but something she had observed among negotiators in general:

I know that the experience of being a young negotiator varies greatly across countries. When I speak with friends [negotiators] from, for example, the African bloc, they often tell me that, as young people, they have limited opportunities to share their opinions. In the Pacific, we are privileged and fortunate that our elders—and most of the colleagues I work with—value our input. I have been given the opportunity to speak on behalf of my country, to represent our negotiating group, and to make statements in formal sessions. That said, there remains a cultural barrier for many young negotiators. There is still an expectation that those with more experience—typically older individuals who have attended more COPs—should be the ones speaking. This creates a clear cultural divide. However, we [youth] cannot simply sit on the sidelines and allow others to debate the commas, periods, and parentheses of our future. (Interview with IP08)

This shows the cultural resistance to norm change, where informal traditions prioritise senior negotiators over younger ones. Deference to “experience” and “seniority” limits youth engagement, with some regions fostering inclusion while others perpetuate exclusion—thereby reinforcing power hierarchies and impeding the advancement of intergenerational equity norms.

In sum, norm antipreneurship to intergenerational equity within the UNFCCC COP negotiations is less about overt opposition to youth inclusion and more about the ways in which youth participation is instrumentalised to serve existing power structures. The actors involved range from delegation leaders and government gatekeepers, who control when and how young negotiators can speak, to states or institutional structures (like presidencies) that deploy youth as symbolic representatives while resisting ambitious climate outcomes. Further, through

analysis of empirical data, I observed that norm antipreneurs resist not single norms but clusters, with the degree of contestation shaped by resistance to other norms aligned with intergenerational equity. For example, advocacy linking intergenerational equity to anti-fossil fuel norms may face different opponents than efforts to embed it within global earth stewardship norms.⁴⁰²

6.2.1.4 Human Right Norms

Human rights norms, the incorporation of its language, and the advocacy (or climate movements) around it—face complex opposition from actors operating through diverse strategies. There are State parties that are directly opposed to human rights outcomes and its potential embeddedness in the negotiation text.

Governments that don't want human rights outcomes won't say it and will be part of that background dealing to get it out. But there are a few that will actually say it, like Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Russia. (Interview with IP03)

This resistance has become increasingly systematic, however an interviewee who is also a local political activist in the United Kingdom and having been an observer at the UNFCCC COPs for years note the normative advancement of the right to a clean healthy and sustainable environment⁴⁰³ as a human right norm which are being extensively championed by socio-legal transnational advocacy networks and climate movements:

Within all that [of UNFCCC COP negotiation] normative landscape which have been fairly limited, with some Member States that have been growing more and more resistant to any mention of human rights in those particular spaces. [...] At the same time, however, in parallel to that, as you know, with the recognition of a right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment as being one of the positive normative developments. (Interview with IP01)

The opposition operates both through direct confrontation and behind-the-scenes manoeuvring, as evidenced by actors "not particularly keen to have civil society - like Saudi Arabia,"⁴⁰⁴ who work to exclude civil society participation. This resistance extends beyond traditional authoritarian states, with broader "push back from some developing countries around the notion of human rights,"⁴⁰⁵ indicating that human rights norm antipreneurship involves both direct

⁴⁰² Interview with IP05, IP06, IP13, IP20

⁴⁰³ See, *Chapter 4: Global Norms and International Climate Negotiations – Section 4.3.4 Human Rights Norms* to explore how Right to A Clean, Healthy, and Sustainable Environment is identified as a prominent and evolving human rights norm.

⁴⁰⁴ Interview with IP04

⁴⁰⁵ Interview with IP19

and indirect strategies across diverse country groupings. Further, one interviewee notes that if a normative argument is presented in terms of equity—“response measures need to be just and fair”—even authoritarian states will embrace it, but if framed as human rights or intergenerational justice, they resist.⁴⁰⁶ As such, it unpacks how norm antipreneurs invoke alternative discourses that resonate with their interests (e.g. sovereignty or economic fairness) to push back against rights-based or climate justice frames.

The described restrictions exemplify procedural resistance to human rights norms in climate governance, where limiting civil society’s freedom of expression and assembly constrains participatory parity. Such containment reflects a form of norm antipreneurship that undermines the operationalisation of rights-based principles without openly rejecting them, thereby reinforcing existing power asymmetries in UNFCCC negotiations.

Further, freedom of civic and democratic expression was restricted as observed by interviewees. One negotiator points:

Let’s say in COP27, movements were restricted—people could not protest. In COP28, it felt like protest could exist, but it was very choreographed. You felt like your agency was taken away, even though you were still “participating.” These are not right, especially when we talk about a democratic process and whether it can influence decision-making. When the basic rights of people in a system are violated, or they simply don’t have them, history shows that it can lead to uprisings and anger—that’s how movements have come [...]. In any circumstance, these are not the right approaches, such as not letting civil society have its voice in a democratic process.
(Interview with IP20)

The described restrictions exemplify procedural resistance by COP presidencies (Egypt and UAE) to human rights norms, where limiting civil society’s freedom of expression and assembly constrains participatory parity. Such containment reflects a form of norm antipreneurship that undermines the operationalisation of rights-based principles without openly rejecting them, thereby reinforcing existing power asymmetries in UNFCCC negotiations.

Overall, the resistance to human rights norms in the UNFCCC—ranging from direct opposition to procedural containment—demonstrates how states and other actors strategically preserve sovereignty and control over negotiation spaces. By reframing and/or sidelining rights-based

⁴⁰⁶ Interview with IP04

discourse, norm antipreneurs weaken the institutionalisation of human rights within climate negotiations while maintaining the appearance of legitimate multilateral engagement.

6.2.1.5 Loss and Damage Norms

There are definite norm antipreneurs for the Loss and Damage norms. Loss and Damage norms, its diffusion, and/or the advocacy around it face opposition from both developed and emerging economies, creating what I describe as a 'two-front struggle' which was explained vividly by a Loss and Damage negotiator, who has been in this UNFCCC COP negotiation space for more than a decade years.

[There are] dual enemies—developed countries and also emerging developing countries. [...] It happened in the loss and damage fund mechanism last year when we tried to design, we tried to identify sources for loss and damage funding. And of course, we wanted developed countries to take lead with an obligation and also on a voluntary basis from the emerging economies like Saudi Arabia. But very interestingly, they got united. And now we're in trouble. (Interview with IP06)

This reveals a significant strategic shift in climate negotiations that complicates traditional North-South dynamics around climate finance. Climate advocacy coalitions, particularly those representing the most vulnerable nations, now face opposition from two distinct but increasingly coordinated fronts. Historically, climate negotiations have been characterised by a binary opposition between developed countries (bearing historical responsibility for greenhouse gas emissions) and developing countries (seeking climate finance and support). However, the interviewee exposes the emergence of a coalition that represents a sophisticated form of norm antipreneurship converging the resistance between traditional developed nation opponents and emerging major emitters who have substantial economic capacity but maintain developing country status.

On another front, the US employs strategic reframing to avoid direct rejection, portraying an abstractness of the agenda item(s) to maintain status quo. They ask (an interviewee notes):

Not that [they're] opposed to loss and damage finance, but let's think it through. Is it about loss and damage or is it about adaptation? (Interview with IP07)⁴⁰⁷

This rhetorical strategy deflects compensation discussions toward adaptation funding. Historical responsibility has been systematically erased from key agreements, as evidenced in the Paris Agreement where "historical responsibilities are not there and Paragraph 51, that says

⁴⁰⁷ Interview with IP07

that Article 8 does not provide any basis for liability and compensation."⁴⁰⁸ Further, during the closing plenary of COP25, it was acknowledged that there was an absence of consensus on Warsaw International Mechanism (WIM) governance, deferring substantive discussion to COP26 and adopting only procedural measures. Palestine, speaking for the G-77/China coalition, emphasised that this interim decision would not prejudice future deliberations on WIM governance structures. Tuvalu expressed frustration that a single party—whom they kept unnamed but identified as a party that soon will leave this UNFCCC process—obstructed progress on WIM decision-making under the COP framework (IISD Earth Negotiations Bulletin, 2019). Considering the withdrawal of the United States from Paris Agreement soon after, this “unnamed” norm antipreneur is revealed.

The European Union similarly opposes liability frameworks, as:

[...] when it comes to, for example, questions of liability and compensation. If you call this a normative argument, then you would also get the EU to reject it. (Interview with IP04)

This coordinated opposition from major developed economies, combined with resistance from emerging polluters, has effectively blocked meaningful progress on loss and damage compensation mechanisms despite decades of advocacy from vulnerable nations. As such, as studied in Chapter 4 of this thesis, discussions around Loss and Damage, and its norm diffusion in UNFCCC COP negotiations is a: “a long fight that came with two steps forward, one step backward.”⁴⁰⁹

6.2.1.6 Global Earth Stewardship Norms

Norm antipreneurs for Global Earth Stewardship norms include actors undermining norms supporting biodiversity, ocean conservation, mountains and more were challenged and contested. Empirical evidence highlights two principal actors, whose resistance carries disproportionate impact due to the scale and ecological significance of the biodiversity-rich areas under their jurisdiction. Notably, opposition to anti-fossil fuel and climate justice norms often coincides with resistance to Global Earth Stewardship norms, reflecting the tendency of these norms to cluster within negotiation agendas.

Argentina, for instance, under varying administrations, has demonstrated inconsistent stand during negotiations, often prioritising its fossil fuel development interests, particularly

⁴⁰⁸ Interview with IP06

⁴⁰⁹ Interview with IP02

regarding the *Vaca Muerta* shale formation (Basso, 2024; Villegas and Raszewski, 2024). Despite the blocking of Global Earth Stewardship norms, it blocks anti-fossil fuel norms. Amid escalating geopolitical instability in the oil-rich Middle East, the ongoing war in Ukraine involving major gas producer Russia, and the sustained diplomatic isolation of Venezuela, investors demonstrate a pronounced readiness to secure stable new sources of oil and liquefied natural gas (LNG) from Argentina (Villegas and Raszewski, 2024). Their evolving stance on fossil fuel production—characterised by the exploitation of natural resources and the obstruction of biodiversity conservation; though in the national interests for economic development (Villegas and Raszewski, 2024).—renders their position within the UNFCCC COPs highly contested. A negotiator observed:

Some countries are essentially threatening to withdraw from the [UNFCCC] Convention. This is, of course, partly a narrative [...] but it reflects their frustration. Such sentiments are compounded by rising populism. For example, Argentina attempted to close its environmental ministry, and other countries have questioned why they should maintain such institutions if they do not engage in multilateral diplomacy or believe in the UN. This can be a significant threat for the Convention because if countries start to leave, others might follow, or at least it will gain less and less attention. [...] I feel the UN is definitely not delivering what they should deliver, not only climate. It is definitely, I think, a very central piece in the fight because it is a global crisis. (Interview with IP13)

Here, the negotiator speaks about the threat to the multilateral process by norm antipreneurs. Specifically, Argentina's national policies like transforming indigenous peoples' lands to mining sites, are testimonies to their stand in blocking Global Earth Stewardship norms in the multilateral negotiations (Meadows, 2024). The negotiator's observation underscores the fragility of the UNFCCC's multilateral framework when confronted with norm antipreneurship. The negotiator's reference to countries threatening withdrawal, even if largely rhetorical, signals a delegitimising tactic that can erode collective trust and weaken the perceived value of participation. In the context of rising populism, such rhetoric is often paired with domestic policy actions that directly contradict global environmental commitments.

Furthermore, Brazil, particularly during the Jair Bolsonaro administration (2019-2022), significantly withdrew from climate leadership. Bolsonaro's term as president of Brazil saw active blocking of global earth stewardship norms and anti-fossil fuel norms, along with other norms that clustered with it. This position was, however, reversed with President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (Proksch, 2025)—who, along with his ministry, has championed climate causes and successfully brought COP30 to Brazil. Such examples illustrate the heterogeneous

approaches within the region, where economic interests, resource endowments, and domestic political considerations create divergent positions on climate governance norms.

In sum, while norm antipreneurship is often grounded in domestic political and economic imperatives—particularly connected with fossil fuel exploitation—it can also be amplified by populist narratives that frame multilateral engagement as ineffectual or contrary to national sovereignty. The fluctuation in Brazil’s stance between two governments further illustrates that norm antipreneurs are not static; it is contingent on political leadership, governance priorities, and international positioning. This volatility underscores both the vulnerability and resilience of the UNFCCC: while powerful states can obstruct norm diffusion, shifts in domestic politics can rapidly re-open pathways for norm consolidation and renewed climate leadership.

6.2.1.7 Ecocide Norms

Ecocide norms while championed by climate movements, they have not been tabled as a formal agenda item or incorporated within any official agenda. The negotiator from the US denied knowing or engaging with ecocide norms—implying that national interests weigh against it.⁴¹⁰ For anti-fossil fuel norms, the chapter saw US’s resistance to its norm diffusion. Ecocide norms often cluster with anti-fossil fuel norms—and hence resistors to anti-fossil fuel norms are automatically norm antipreneurs to ecocide norms. Ecocide norms are not just about political compliance or legal accountability—but criminalising state/non-state actors against environmental harms i.e., “unlawful or wanton acts committed with knowledge that there is a substantial likelihood of severe and either widespread or long-term damage to the environment being caused by those acts” (Stop Ecocide International, 2021). This makes many parties across the 198 states in the UNFCCC COP negotiations block/resist the norms. Exceptions are listed as norm champions in *Section - 6.1.1.7*.

Albeit ecocide norms are gaining traction in domestic legislative frameworks, in multilateral negotiations where consensus dominates norm diffusion and permeation, its contested—politically and legally; this is observed by a lawyer:

The problem with criminalising climate change is that it is not always so easy to establish causation. From a criminal law perspective, the question is always: who do you prosecute? Climate change is a systemic issue—our entire global economic system contributes to it. Do you go after the CEO of Exxon? The executives of coal mining companies? Heads of state and government from half the countries in the world? That’s why I think ecocide, in the context of climate change, is more of a slogan than a

⁴¹⁰ Interview with IP18

practical legal tool. It would make more sense for other forms of environmental harm where cause and effect are more immediate. (Interview with IP17)

Hence norm resistance for ecocide norms is often because of the contestation of the normative meaning of the very norm, and its legal as well as political applicability. For states/non-state actors who are not *mala fide* causing environmental harm but pursuing national interests, the diffusion of ecocide norm makes states take creative resistance (Bloomfield, 2016).

6.2.1.8 Sufficiency

Norm antipreneurs to the principled idea of sufficiency largely mirror those resisting anti-fossil fuel, climate justice, and global earth stewardship norms, because sufficiency directly challenges the unsustainable growth-oriented economic paradigms that underpin their national or corporate interests. Petro-states, high-consumption economies, and industry lobbies oppose sufficiency by reframing it as an economic threat—emphasising Gross Domestic Product (GDP) contraction, job losses, or reduced trade competitiveness⁴¹¹—and by promoting alternative narratives such as green growth or efficiency gains that preserve existing production and consumption patterns.

Like in resistance against anti-fossil fuel norms, principled idea of sufficiency is blocked or resisted through both state-level regime resistance (using consensus rules, trade bloc coordination, or strategic reframing to dilute ambition) and non-state lobbying (championing market-driven technological fixes instead of absolute consumption reduction). In negotiations, sufficiency is often sidelined, especially when linked to binding obligations that would constrain affluent states' material throughput or require redistribution of ecological space. This makes the normative content of sufficiency particularly contested.

6.3 Conflict between the Norm Champions and Antipreneurs

In climate negotiations, conflicts between norm champions and norm antipreneurs are sharply evident in both language and practice. Challenges and challengers often are both important in shaping normative configurations, as Pratt specifies (2020). Norm champions push for ambitious measures such as phasing out fossil fuels, adopting just transitions, and embedding human rights and climate justice in negotiation agendas; while norm antipreneurs, often fossil fuel-dependent states and corporate interests, actively block or dilute these proposals. Amidst such conflict the position of climate movements is key in advancing normative discourses,

⁴¹¹ Interview with IP01

helping norm diffusion, and helping manoeuvring actors amidst norm contestation. In climate politics, this tension surfaces in debates over treaty text, commitments, and principles, with each side striving to imprint their (normative) vision on outcomes. As such, this section examines how each norm manifested contestation between norm champions and antipreneurs, analysing its effects and the associated normative shifts. Norms are ‘works in progress,’ hence, both stable and evolving (Wiener, 2004, p. 191). Although here, I clarify that when I mean by conflict: it is not “norm conflict” where two norms—each prescribing what actors should or should not do—cannot be followed at the same time because they give incompatible or contradictory directives (see Milanović, 2009; Beirlaen, 2011; Rüland and Welsh, 2024). However, this section look at actor conflict over norms i.e., the norms themselves might not be inherently contradictory, but the actors disagree about which norms should apply, how they should be interpreted, or how they should be prioritised. That said, actor conflict is about contestation over norms.

A distinct pattern on conflict is observed which norm antipreneurs does not block norms outright but have constrained their procedural entry points and dictated the tempo of their operationalisation.⁴¹² Norm conflicts in global climate governance are rarely zero-sum contests; rather, they often produce simultaneous norm contestation and transformation. For instance, the intense resistance to fossil fuel phase-out—led by industry actors and fossil fuel-aligned states—did not simply block norm diffusion at COP28. Instead, it shaped a negotiated outcome in which climate movements and allied coalitions buffered the effects of norm antipreneurs.⁴¹³ These movements, composed of transnational advocacy networks and alliances among state and non-state actors, played a crucial role in maintaining normative continuity amid contestation. Through strategic counter-tactics—such as engaging frames of moral principles like justice, equity, and duty to care—norm champions managed to sustain and adapt the diffusion of anti-fossil fuel norms. This resilience is reflected in the final COP28 outcome text, which for the first time incorporated language on “transitioning away from fossil fuels in energy systems, in a just, orderly and equitable manner,” and on “accelerating efforts towards the phase-down of unabated coal power.”⁴¹⁴ These formulations emerged not in isolation but as the product of protracted normative negotiation, where the climate movement’s persistent discourse helped crystallise otherwise heavily contested language. Moreover, the fact that such

⁴¹² Interview with IP06, IP14

⁴¹³ Interview with IP05, IP13, IP20

⁴¹⁴ UNFCCC 1/CMA.5; See, FCCC/PA/CMA/2023/16/Add.1

negotiations took place at COP28—hosted by a major petrostate—underscores the contestation, and the normative mainstreaming achieved through public mobilisation. Global climate movements succeeded in projecting climate imperatives across trade, economic, and diplomatic channels, forcing even traditionally resistant actors to engage with the emerging normative constellation. As one interviewee observed, the inclusion of Petro-states in substantive discussions signals the extent to which climate politics has become unavoidable in global diplomacy.⁴¹⁵ However, across the globe, the tactics of norm antipreneurs have changed (arguably) from blatantly blocking the norms to defining the pace and terms of that transition.

Similar procedural shaping has occurred in Loss and Damage negotiations, where norm antipreneurs have recalibrated opposition from outright denial to procedural barriers: like re-diverting funds from adaptation to Loss and Damage funds so as not to fund more and restricting contributor base definitions.⁴¹⁶ A notable development has been a dual-front resistance: a convergence between developed economies—driven by liability aversion, and fiscally capable emerging economies—driven by claims for status-based exemptions. (Gabbatiss and Dunne, 2023).

A second pattern of conflict between norm antipreneurs and champions are in the use of discursive (re)framing. Here, antipreneurs acknowledge a norm's existence but redirect its meaning or replace it with less demanding alternatives. For instance, the conflict between norm champions and antipreneurs are palpable in this regard for climate justice norms. Their normative content has clustered CBDR-RC, just transition, and duty of care (e.g., adaptation scale-up, and debt relief).⁴¹⁷ Champions like SIDS, Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), Least Developed Countries (LDCs), African Group of Negotiators (AGN), Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America *Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América* (ALBA) have translated moral authority into institutional hooks, embedding and mainstreaming it to loss-and-damage, rights-based language, and equity references. Antipreneurs, especially among major developed economies, have pursued de-differentiation (i.e., flattening CBDR), and actor diversion (spotlighting China).⁴¹⁸ Justice claims have nevertheless rebounded through normative clustering—where resilience to norms amidst contestation is noted. Here, climate justice norms are observed to cluster with loss and damage

⁴¹⁵ Interview with IP01

⁴¹⁶ Interview with IP06

⁴¹⁷ Interview with IP14

⁴¹⁸ Interview with IP14

norms and/or human-rights norms. Thus, contestation has not erased climate justice; it has redistributed it across venues and agenda items, sustaining a multi-sited diffusion that has constrained outright rollback. Over the past five COPs i.e., COP 24–28, climate justice norms have both advanced and encountered roadblocks. A recent empirical study of UNFCCC discourse (2015–2021) finds that concepts of “multiple climate justices”—including intergenerational and global equity—have gained significant traction, altering the frames used even by delegates in negotiations (Nisbett and Spaiser, 2023, p. 1), with “clear evidence of norm permeation” as terms like justice, fairness, duty of care for the vulnerable, and calls to protect future generations became commonplace (Nisbett and Spaiser, 2023, p. 3).

A third pattern marginalising certain norms from COP agenda, thereby containing their potential to generate binding obligations. Such negotiation dynamics are seen across Global Earth Stewardship norms, principled idea of sufficiency and ecocide norms. For example, at COP26, a coalition of countries—including the United Kingdom, Colombia, France, the European Union, the United States, Singapore, Fiji, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mexico, Norway, Australia, Canada, and Liberia—advocated for the formal inclusion of Nature-Based Solutions (NbS) in the *Glasgow Climate Pact*. Their aim was to integrate climate and biodiversity agendas by recognising NbS as vital for both mitigation and adaptation efforts. However, this proposal faced opposition from Bolivia and other members of the Like-Minded Developing Countries (LMDC) group (Chandrasekhar and Viglione, 2021). They expressed concerns that the term "nature-based solutions" lacked a clear definition and could lead to the commodification of nature, potentially undermining indigenous rights and ecological integrity (Chandrasekhar and Viglione, 2021). In addition, scepticism amongst Indigenous leaders and Global South was prevalent, worrying that NbS might be a vehicle for carbon offset markets or land grabs by corporations (as numerous civil society groups warned) (Gerretsen, 2021). As a result of these objections, explicit references to NbS were removed from the final text. Yet, movements such as Fridays for Future, Extinction Rebellion, and coalitions like Climate Action Network (CAN) and Global Youth Biodiversity Network (GYBN) consistently framed the climate and biodiversity crises as inseparable. This framing positioned GES norms not as an add-on, but as a moral and ecological imperative, aligning with principles of climate justice, indigenous rights, and intergenerational equity. Thus, at COP27, NbS was incorporated into the Cover Decision.⁴¹⁹ The definitional ambiguity of NbS was not the only constraint, since

⁴¹⁹ See, Cover Decision -/CP.27 Paragraph 48

intergenerational norms, and climate justice norms are critiqued to have such ambiguity/abstractness⁴²⁰—but the role of movements and norm champions role in multiplying the normative influences of these norm clusters/norms are critical in sustaining its resiliency amidst contestation, evoking norm cascades and internalisation.

Thus, this section notes three patterns as to how norm antipreneurs and champions contest over norms and normative meanings during UNFCCC COP negotiations. Across these three patterns—norm contestation has not yielded wholesale erasure of a norm. Rather, it has generated adaptive trajectories in which norms persist—diffusing in climate negotiations with resilience. The mediating role of climate movements and transnational advocacy networks is visible in all patterns, sustaining normative momentum by translating thin textual recognition into future negotiation leverage, and by embedding contested norms within broader justice, integrity, and accountability frames.

Conclusion

This chapter has studied the intricate ecosystem of actors who shape norm diffusion within UNFCCC COP negotiations, revealing a far more complex landscape for normative discourses to emanate, sustain and/or fade. Throughout the chapter it is evident that the influence of norm antipreneurs and norm champions occur on a continuum rather than as absolute categories. Drawing on Bloomfield's framework, I identify a spectrum of roles: on one end are norm entrepreneurs, *pure changers* single-mindedly push for ambitious normative shifts (for example, the alliance of small island states and climate-vulnerable nations demanding a fossil fuel phase-out), and on the other extreme, *implacable resisters* staunchly defend the old order and reject change (certain Petro-states or industries fitting this description (2016, p. 311). In between, there are nuanced positions—*competitor entrepreneurs* who agree on the need for a norm but compete over its content or stringency, and *creative resisters* who generally uphold the status quo yet are open to incremental adjustments under pressure (see Acharya, 2011; Bloomfield, 2016; Campbell-Verduyn, 2017).

The role of climate movements in helping states shift positions, name and shame, carrying the moral principles further for norm champions messages and aid in persuasion is critical. In the climate negotiations, when actors like the EU might be a competitor entrepreneur, a country

⁴²⁰ Interview with IP07, IP17

like India could be deemed a creative resister.⁴²¹ This nuanced view reminds us that labelling any given actor simply as a “champion” or “antipreneur” can oversimplify reality—many switch roles depending on the specific norm at stake or the circumstances. Nevertheless, the analytical distinction of norm antipreneur is valuable because it highlights the deliberate and often organised resistance that new norms face. Recognising who the blockers are and how they operate helps in devising strategies to overcome their influence. Ultimately, the tug-of-war over norms in climate negotiations has profound implications. The gradual incorporation of phrases like “moving away from fossil fuels” into formal COP decisions (as finally happened in the *Glasgow Climate Pact* and tentatively in COP28’s outcome) shows that norm entrepreneurs are making some headway (van Asselt and Green, 2022). The constant contestation in the climate negotiations fuelled by norm antipreneurs means that emerging norms often enter the international arena in watered-down form or accompanied by ambiguous caveats, which can slow their internalisation and implementation. Norm change, therefore, tends to be incremental and hard-fought. The evidence and interviews presented in this section underscore that whenever a norm (or cluster of norms) aims to constrain fossil fuels or fundamentally alter economic structures, norm antipreneurs will mobilise to block, dilute, or delay it at every turn.

The chapter’s findings also underscore how traditional North-South dichotomies in climate negotiations have become increasingly inadequate for understanding contemporary norm dynamics. The emergence of cross-regional coalitions like the High Ambition Coalition, the strategic positioning of middle-income countries through groups like AILAC, and the complex positioning of emerging economies within BASIC demonstrate how normative alignment increasingly transcends traditional development categories. This fragmentation of previously coherent negotiating blocs reflects deeper shifts in global power relations, normative priorities and evolving global order. Critically, the analysis also reveals how structural inequalities in negotiating capacity continue to shape norm diffusion outcomes.

Perhaps most significantly, this chapter reveals that norm contestation in climate negotiations produces neither straightforward victory nor defeat, but rather adaptive and multifaceted transformation. Each global climate norm, norm cluster, constellation, normative discourse(s), and/or normative configuration(s)—imply a mutually reinforcing pattern that is predicated by human agency within and outside negotiations, irrespective of whether the ‘human’ is part of

⁴²¹ See, *Chapter 6: Norm Champions and Norm Antipreneurs* - Section: 6.2.1.1.1 Equity and Developmental Claims

a state, alliance, or climate movement. This doesn't oversimplify the geopolitics that has its effect on human agency and their positionality in advancing or blocking norms. However, the combinations of each norm and norm clusters create a kaleidoscopic effect of picturing a different and nuanced normative response/discourse—yet, rooted in moral principles like equity, justice, solidarity and duty of care. This is hard-won over the decades where climate movements, states, and more have had a part to play.

Chapter 7: COP Negotiation Processes, the Cover Decisions, and Normative Gains

Chapter 7 examines whether the UNFCCC Conference of Parties (COP) cover decisions reflect normative discourses and arguments advanced by climate movements—thus, showing normative gains? By normative gains, I refer to progress made in the recognition, acceptance, or embedding of a norm within a political, legal, or institutional setting of UNFCCC COPs. In UNFCCC COP negotiations, cover decisions are overarching political outcomes adopted at the end of a COP—without formal mandate or specific agenda item (Bansard and Akanle Eni-ibukun, 2024). Unlike technical decisions, they serve as political umbrella statements capturing high-level messages, cross-cutting issues, and collective party commitments across multiple themes, including non-agenda items. While much of the negotiations remains technical, the cover decisions align parties' behaviours with UNFCCC expectations and create transparency and legitimacy during the negotiating process. They also are the vehicle for political consensus-building.

Cover decisions are "open-ended and, in recent years, have been used to capture the progress made in the negotiations and various events held adjacent to the negotiations." (IISD Earth Negotiations Bulletin, 2022, p. 3). During the final plenaries of the UNFCCC COPs, each treaty body i.e., COP, CMA, and CMP⁴²²—adopts multiple decisions. The initial decisions in this series (designated 1/CP.x and 1/CMA.x) are usually understood as the "cover" decisions (Legal Response International, 2025), though with some exceptions.⁴²³ Unlike treaties, cover decisions lack binding force over states and cannot be legally enforced, however, cover decisions may achieve legal bindingness depending on the treaty's enabling clause and parties' intention (Legal Response International, 2025). With respect to the legality of cover decisions, there are aspects of cover decisions where the language aligns to procedural obligations—positing legal character that binds states to the need for compliance. For instance, "shall" is a word with legal character; this is seen in Art 4(s) of the Paris Agreement (on NDC submissions). Further, the recent ICJ advisory opinion on climate change in Paragraph 184

⁴²² The Conference of the Parties (COP), the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement (CMA), and the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol (CMP)

⁴²³ See *Chapter 3: Methodology* to read about the selection of cover decisions for the thesis.

clarified that in certain circumstances the decisions of COP cover decisions have certain legal effects and may even constitute subsequent agreements under Article 31 Paragraph 3 (a), of the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties⁴²⁴ (International Court of Justice, 2025). That said, unless otherwise written with legal language, cover decisions generally function as manifestations of political commitment, consensus, or intention among participating states, delineating collective objectives, principles, or pledges without requiring formal ratification or signature.

In summary, while a cover decision is the flagship decision of a COP that provides a unifying political narrative and signal parties' collective resolve, in doing so it also provides a space in which normatively-driven climate movements, transnational advocacy networks and advocacies beyond State parties give tooth to climate action and ambition.⁴²⁵

To study such dynamics, this chapter divides into two: Assessing incorporation of global norms across COPs [*Section 7.1*]; and concluding by identifying trends in embedding normative discourses within COP negotiation texts [*Section 7.2*]. Through discourse analysis of COP24–28 cover decisions,⁴²⁶ this chapter investigates how normative discourses, frames, and configurations develop, interact, and become incorporated into final decision texts, thus corroborating with findings from Chapters 4, 5, and 6.

7.1 Tracing Normative Gains at COPs

By recognising that cover decisions emerge from political negotiations among parties, their delegations, and group alliances, this section analyses how each annual climate negotiations from COP 24-28 incorporated the eight (or fewer) global norms. Each sub-section which looks at each COP in particular—assesses whether cover decisions remained open or closed to normative influence from both internal party dynamics and external non-state actors.

7.1.1 COP24

COP24's outcome focused on adopting the detailed *Katowice Climate Package*—setting out the essential procedures and mechanisms to make the Paris Agreement operational. The main decisions (Decisions 1/CP.24; 3/CMA.1) bundled the numerous technical agreements on transparency, mitigation, adaptation, finance, and cooperative approaches. There is contention

⁴²⁴ Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties (1980) UNTS 1155 [331]

⁴²⁵ Interview with IP04

⁴²⁶ See *Chapter 3: Methodology Section 3.1.1 Expert Interviews* to read more on how the methodology of discourse analysis for COP24-28 cover decisions.

as to whether *Katowice Climate Package* as a whole or Decision 1/CP.24 acts as a cover decision. Even as scholars agree that Decision 1/CP.24 functioned as a cover decision by formally adopting the suite of Paris Agreement Work Programme (PAWP) outcomes: serving as the political seal on the Paris Rulebook (Khare, 2022) —I, however, analysed *Katowice Climate Package* as a whole, to capture the political dynamics within the negotiations in the incorporation of global norms in official texts. In the *Katowice Climate Package* nine specific areas of 1/CP.21 (i.e., Paris Agreement) were given procedural signposting through 1/CP.24 and 3/CMA.1 to 20/CMA.1.⁴²⁷ Such complex set of decisions had to be analysed to bring out the nuance I required in tracking normative gains.

The COP24 cover decision has no mention of ‘intergenerational equity’ or ‘children’⁴²⁸, yet “youth” are mentioned thrice⁴²⁹—as a call out to universities, civil society and youth to scale up *Action for Climate Empowerment*. The textual incorporation was critiqued to have not matched or resonated intergenerational equity norms. This is so because, the normative discourse surrounding intergenerational equity was observed to have traction mainly through Greta Thunberg’s activism in the Blue Zone (Sutter and Davidson, 2018). Several students came in protest (Sutter and Davidson, 2018), signalling a normative shift in the negotiation space, although that year textual reference in cover decisions was limited.

With respect to climate justice as a term in the official cover decision made some advances although it was referred to only once:

Noting the importance of ensuring the integrity of all ecosystems, including in forests, the ocean and the cryosphere, and the protection of biodiversity, recognised by some cultures as Mother Earth, and also noting the importance for some of the concept of ‘climate justice’, when taking action to address climate change. (Decision 1/CP.24)

In a landmark initiative, Poland launched the *Solidarity and Just Transition Silesia Declaration*,⁴³⁰ signed by about 50 states (Robins, 2019). This declaration, was noted in the final COP text rather than formally agreed, highlighting that emissions reduction should occur in tandem with a “just transition”⁴³¹ for affected workers and communities—bolstering norm clusters of climate justice norms and human rights norms.

⁴²⁷ See more in *Chapter 3 Methodology*

⁴²⁸ Decision 1/CP.24 and 3/CMA.1

⁴²⁹ Decision 17/CMA.1 Paragraph 7, 10, 12(c)

⁴³⁰ Cover Decision 1/CP.24 Part VII. Leaders’ Summit Paragraph 48

⁴³¹ Cover Decision 1/CP.24 Part VII. Leaders’ Summit Paragraph 48

COP24 cover decision did not mention of human rights. In the final hours of COP24, the only human-rights reference was dropped when parties postponed the Article 6 decision (Center for International Environmental Law - Press, 2018). A negotiator spoke about the divergence of language with respect to Article 6:

In the UNFCCC process, there has been strong resistance to this—whether in cover decisions that go beyond agreed language, or even, at times, to language that has already been agreed. One of the main reasons we have not been able to finalise Article 6, which has been under negotiation for many years, is the challenge of ensuring that environmental integrity and human rights are meaningfully taken into account. (Interview with IP02)

The protracted Article 6 negotiations demonstrate how contestation of normative configurations create substantive procedural deadlock beyond mere rhetorical positioning. The negotiator's observation of "strong resistance" to both new and previously "agreed language" reveals the dynamic and complex nature of negotiations. The connection requirements for environmental integrity and human rights in Article 6 suggests that normative frames constitute to difficult negotiating-points during so-called technical negotiations. This contestation reflects deeper ideological divisions wherein human rights discourse inclusion or exclusion raise strong feelings amongst parties and observers (including civil society organisations, youth climate movements, TANs and more).

The loss and damage mechanism (i.e., the *Warsaw International Mechanism*) was addressed in a separate decision; the mention of "loss and damage" occurred six times in *Katowice Climate Package*.⁴³²

As for Global Earth Stewardship norms, COP24 cover decisions did not record any mention of 'biodiversity', 'oceans' or principles aligning societal behaviors and norms with environmental incentives to foster sustainable interactions and synergies between society and the biosphere. The *Talanoa Dialogue* (the Fijian-inspired inclusive conversation about raising ambition) conducted at COP24 allowed many parties—especially LDCs and small island states—to frame greater climate ambition as a matter of justice, survival and a moral imperative (Winkler and Depledge, 2018). This strategic platform, thus, helped in norm clusters—bolstering normative frames. The *Talanoa Dialogue*⁴³³ was supported by many parties, however, notable recorded vocal support, during the plenaries, were from EU stating that it needed to be reflected in national policies, Colombia on behalf of AILAC, and Maldives for AOSIS, and Korea for

⁴³² Decision 18/CMA.1 – Annex I Paragraph 115; Decision 19/CMA.1 Paragraph 6 (b) (ii), 36 (e).

⁴³³ Decision 1/CP.24 Part-V Paragraph 30-37

Environmental Integrity Group (IISD Earth Negotiations Bulletin, 2018). *Talanoa Dialogue* helped cluster norms together—specifically the normative discourses around anti-fossil fuel norms, climate justice, and loss and damage.

To conclude, the outcome of COP24 reflects both the constraints and evolving capacities of the UNFCCC regime to accommodate normative shifts driven by movements and epistemic interventions. While the cover decision reveals selective incorporation of norms: climate justice, loss and damage, and intergenerational equity norms, there was clear exclusion of human rights, and anti-fossil fuel commitments in the core texts.

7.1.2 COP25

The cover decision of COP25 held in Madrid, Spain, under Chile's presidency was named as *Chile-Madrid Time for Action*. COP25 was the longest COP and while the negotiations came close to collapsing without any agreement, it managed to achieve a few breakthroughs (Evans and Gabbatiss, 2019). parties struggled to reach consensus on many issues (e.g. carbon markets). Notably, three separate decisions were adopted, each titled *Chile-Madrid Time for Action*, under the COP, CMP, and CMA respectively (see Obergassel *et al.*, 2020), although tailored to the specific framework (i.e., UNFCCC, Kyoto Protocol, Paris Agreement). They share a common political message but differ in scope, substance, and obligations.⁴³⁴

Decision 1/CP.25 frames COP25's political priorities, emphasising enhanced mitigation ambition,⁴³⁵ integrating findings from the 2019 IPCC Special Reports (paras. 6–7), highlighting finance commitments,⁴³⁶ promoting equity, just transition, and gender equality,⁴³⁷ and establishing follow-up processes such as a round table on pre-2020 ambition.⁴³⁸ Nevertheless, normative themes at COP25 were more pronounced at side events and protests than in the faltering negotiations, which were bogged down by technical battles (especially over carbon market rules and finance). Paul Watkinson, former chair of one of the Subsidiary Bodies of the UNFCCC and chief negotiator for France during the COP21 summit in Paris, explained how

⁴³⁴ Decision 1/CMA.2 operationalises the Paris Agreement, urging parties to submit updated NDCs reflecting their “highest possible ambition” (paras. 6–8) provide long-term low-emission strategies (para. 11), enhance adaptation planning and communications (paras. 12–14) and scale up financial and capacity-building support for vulnerable countries (paras. 15–17). By contrast, Decision 1/CMP.15 has a narrower scope, focusing on pre-2020 Kyoto Protocol commitments and urging parties to ratify the Doha Amendment (paras. 2–4).

⁴³⁵ Decision 1/CP.25 Paragraphs 8, 10

⁴³⁶ Decision 1/CP.25 Paragraphs. 11, 14

⁴³⁷ Decision 1/CP.25 Paragraphs 16-17

⁴³⁸ Decision 1/CP.25 Paragraphs. 19–21

the COP25 cover decision was unique as a political statement and offered a precedent for the Glasgow text:

Madrid was the first time we had a decision that was purely a political overview decision, including points that needed a home which did not exist elsewhere. The COP26 decision takes that a lot further with a long list and a wide scope. It was a risky move, but I think it has worked. (Evans *et al.*, 2021)

Unlike other cover decisions of COP24-28, the COP25 decision not only acknowledges civil society's calls for urgent climate action but starts with embedding it in the text:

Cognizant of the efforts and concerns of civil society, in particular of youth and indigenous peoples, in calling for urgent and ambitious global climate action. (Decision 1/CP.25)

This was an acknowledgement to global norms that were radically engaging inside the negotiations and permeating through, because of climate movements and TANs. In addition, the incorporation of youth in the preambular section of the cover decision reinforced intergenerational equity norms and human right norms through indigenous rights, even when the text still did not explicitly mention "human rights" or "climate justice." This acknowledgement to civil society was the result of the massive youth climate movements and TANs around Madrid, albeit surrounding incidents of activist struggles within and outside of COP negotiation space.⁴³⁹ That said, although neither 'intergenerational equity' nor 'children' were mentioned in the COP25 cover decision, the term 'youth' was mentioned once (as seen above in the excerpt).⁴⁴⁰ The cover decisions did not mention or indicate any such language or mention supporting anti-fossil fuel norms, despite calls to phase out fossil fuels grew louder around COP25.

While "climate justice" remains absent from the cover decision, civil society organisations and NGOs vocally advocated for its recognition throughout COP25.⁴⁴¹ Human rights were not also mentioned in the cover decision. The cover decision does not mention Loss and Damage. In terms of Global Earth Stewardship norms, in COP25, biodiversity is mentioned only once, underscoring the need for an integrated approach, where biodiversity and climate nexus and efforts for both should be applicable to both:

⁴³⁹ See, *Chapter 5: Influence of Global Norms on Negotiations and Agreements*

⁴⁴⁰ Decision 1/CP.25

⁴⁴¹ See, *Chapter 5: Influence of Global Norms on Negotiations and Agreements*

Underlines the essential contribution of nature to addressing climate change and its impacts and the need to address biodiversity loss and climate change in an integrated manner. (Decision 1/CP.25 Paragraph 15)

Further, the COP25, termed as the “Blue COP”, bolstered discussions underscoring the significance of oceans within the Earth's climate system, and acknowledging the necessity to maintain the health of marine and coastal ecosystems amid climatic shifts.⁴⁴² Chile's presidency introduced an Ocean Dialogue into the UNFCCC process (2025b). This was a tangible integration of ocean stewardship into climate work. Additionally, the cover decision requested a parallel dialogue on land and climate in 2020.⁴⁴³

In sum, the COP25 cover decision shows that while climate justice, loss and damage norms, human rights, and anti-fossil fuel norms permeated as normative gains. Nevertheless, the decision's acknowledgment of civil society, particularly youth and indigenous peoples, and its unique political framing marked a normative shift: one in which non-state actors began shaping the symbolic and discursive architecture of UNFCCC texts more visibly. This porousness of negotiations to global normative discourses and arguments—despite the formal exclusion of key terms—suggests a slow, contested normative framework.

7.1.3 COP26

Even amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, COP26 negotiations in Glasgow signified a normative breakthrough driven by intensified advocacy and evolving political dynamics. The cover decision for COP26 was termed *The Glasgow Climate Pact* (GCP) which has three versions: Decision 1/CP.26, 1/CMA.3 and 1/CMP.16. While 1/CP.26 and 1/CMA.3 contain overlapping text, the latter is more comprehensive, reflecting the Paris Agreement's status as the primary operational treaty within the climate change regime. A third version of cover decision i.e., Decision 1/CMP.16 was adopted under the Kyoto Protocol, but procedural text, acknowledging the conclusion of the Protocol's second commitment period at the end of 2020 (Depledge, Saldivia and Peñasco, 2022).⁴⁴⁴

⁴⁴² The Decision 1/CP.25 specifically highlights the ocean's role particularly in paragraphs 30-31 and 33-34; Further, Decision 6/CP.25's Annex mentions the relevance of oceans to climate action within paragraph 67(b).

⁴⁴³ Decision 1/CP.25 Paragraph 32; Also note, the 52nd session of the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA) was held in Bonn, Germany, from 4 October to 12 October 2020 [noting, since the Paragraph 32 mentions of the dialogue be held in the 52nd session of SBSTA].

⁴⁴⁴ See *Chapter 3 Methodology*

While Decisions 1/CMA.3 and 1/CP.26, both titled the *Glasgow Climate Pact*, share overarching themes, their scope, legal basis, and operational detail differ. Adopted under the Paris Agreement, Decision 1/CMA.3 grounds its provisions in Paris Agreement articles,⁴⁴⁵ incorporates quantified targets such as doubling adaptation finance by 2025 from 2019 levels⁴⁴⁶ and revisiting 2030 NDC targets by end-2022,⁴⁴⁷ cites NDC synthesis findings of a 13.7 per cent increase in emissions by 2030⁴⁴⁸ and establishes new mandates including the *Glasgow–Sharm el-Sheikh work programme on the Global Goal on Adaptation*,⁴⁴⁹ a *Mitigation Work Programme* and annual high-level ministerial round table,⁴⁵⁰ and the *Glasgow Dialogue on Loss and Damage Funding*.⁴⁵¹ By contrast, Decision 1/CP.26, under the UNFCCC, frames commitments in terms of the UNFCCC (convention's) objective,⁴⁵² omits most Paris-specific reporting and work programme provisions, avoids quantified finance and emissions targets, and introduces COP negotiation-specific procedural elements such as pre-2020 implementation follow-up,⁴⁵³ land–climate and ocean–climate dialogues,⁴⁵⁴ and an annual youth-led climate forum.⁴⁵⁵ While both affirm the 1.5 °C limit,⁴⁵⁶ phasing down unabated coal and phasing out inefficient fossil fuel subsidies,⁴⁵⁷ and protecting ecosystems,⁴⁵⁸ 1/CMA.3 is more prescriptive and operational for Paris implementation, whereas 1/CP.26 is broader, less specific, and often endorses or references CMA decisions.⁴⁵⁹

Notably, the UK Presidency introduced a comprehensive cover text without explicit prior mandate, constituting an unprecedented overarching decision designed to consolidate political consensus (Evans *et al.*, 2021).

Importantly, it was the first COP decision ever to explicitly name fossil fuels:

⁴⁴⁵ Decision 1/CMA.3 Paragraphs 4, 29, 40, 79

⁴⁴⁶ Decision 1/CMA.3 Paragraph. 18

⁴⁴⁷ Decision 1/CMA.3 Paragraph. 29

⁴⁴⁸ Decision 1/CMA.3 Paragraph. 25

⁴⁴⁹ Decision 1/CMA.3 Paragraphs. 11–12

⁴⁵⁰ Decision 1/CMA.3 Paragraphs. 27, 31

⁴⁵¹ Decision 1/CMA.3 Paragraphs. 73–74

⁴⁵² Decision 1/CP.26 Paragraph. 4

⁴⁵³ Decision 1/CP.26 Paragraphs. 46–47

⁴⁵⁴ Decision 1/CP.26 Paragraphs. 58–61

⁴⁵⁵ Decision 1/CP.26 Paragraph. 65

⁴⁵⁶ Decision 1/CMA.3 Paragraphs 21 and Decision 1/CP.26 Paragraph 16

⁴⁵⁷ Decision 1/CMA.3 Paragraph. 36 and Decision 1/CP.26 Paragraph 20

⁴⁵⁸ Decision 1/CMA.3 Paragraph. 38 and Decision 1/CP.26 Paragraph 21

⁴⁵⁹ See, for instance, Decision 1/CP.26 Paragraph. 43

Calls upon parties to accelerate the development, deployment and dissemination of technologies, and the adoption of policies, to transition towards low-emission energy systems, including by rapidly scaling up the deployment of clean power generation and energy efficiency measures, including accelerating efforts towards the phasedown of unabated coal power and phase-out of inefficient fossil fuel subsidies, while providing targeted support to the poorest and most vulnerable in line with national circumstances and recognizing the need for support towards a just transition; (Decision 1/CP.26 Paragraph 20)

This reference, albeit watered down to “phase down” coal at India and China’s insistence, was historic: no COP text had previously mentioned coal or fossil fuel subsidies. It signaled an emerging anti-fossil-fuel norm, driven by a broad coalition of climate-vulnerable nations and high-ambition developed countries (see Green, 2018; van Asselt and Green, 2022).⁴⁶⁰ Regarding fossil fuel phase-out language, the US, China, India, and South Africa advocated for qualified terms (“unabated coal” and “inefficient subsidies”), while AOSIS and LDCs demanded comprehensive phase-out language. Following informal consultations involving the US, EU, and COP26 President, China and India introduced a floor amendment substituting “phase down unabated coal power” for stronger elimination language (IISD Earth Negotiations Bulletin, 2021). Despite criticism from the Environmental Integrity Group (EIG), EU, and Pacific Island states regarding both the weakened language and non-transparent amendment process, parties accepted the compromised text, resulting in the adoption of the amended *Glasgow Climate Pact* (IISD Earth Negotiations Bulletin, 2021). This throws light on the political process in the negotiations—where there is a compromise between normative clarity and political expediency. It reflects the pressure COP26 had with teeming anti-fossil fuel initiatives and pledges: sporadic alliance-building among parties, and interaction with civil societies, and climate movements—for ratcheting up Nationally Determined Contributions—were unique to any other COPs.

COP26 reaffirmed its commitment to intergenerational equity and inclusivity across various spheres of climate action, as demonstrated by multiple decisions. The cover decision incorporates ‘intergenerational equity’ as a term in the preambular text of Decision 1/CP.26 and Decision 1/CMA.3. Both the decisions mention the role of youth⁴⁶¹ and children,⁴⁶² as

⁴⁶⁰ See also, *Chapter 6: Norm Champions and Norm Antipreneurs* to read who were the norm champions of anti-fossil fuel norms.

⁴⁶¹ See, Decision 1/CP.26 Paragraph 55, 63, 64, and 65; Also, in Decision 1/CMA.3 preambular text, Paragraph 88 and 92.

⁴⁶² See, Decision 1/CP.26 preambular text (children mentioned twice), Paragraphs 55, 63 and 65; Also, in Decision 1/CMA.3 preambular text, Paragraph 88.

such diffusing intergenerational equity norms. At COP26, the push for normative discourses to gain greater traction in negotiations was more tangible than in previous COPs. Also, with the networks within and beyond the UNFCCC COP negotiation space, it provided a plausible ecosystem for climate justice norms to multiply. However, “climate justice” as a term is mentioned once in the Cover Decision.

Noting the importance of ensuring the integrity of all ecosystems, including in forests, the ocean and the cryosphere, and the protection of biodiversity, recognized by some cultures as Mother Earth, and also noting the importance for some of the concept of ‘climate justice’, when taking action to address climate change. (Decision 1/CP.26)

COP26 mainstreamed climate justice discourse through extensive media coverage, negotiator references to fairness and inclusion, and advocacy group framing of outcomes in justice terms. The conference significantly amplified climate justice norms, with equity, inclusion, and moral urgency permeating decisions despite cautious formal language that avoided explicit terminology. The normative frames surrounding climate justice at COP26 indicated the urgent need for concrete measures of climate justice—clustering with norms of loss and damage, and human rights.

The COP26 Cover Decision preamble strongly featured human-rights and equity norms—a response to demands from civil society and many governments:

Acknowledging that climate change is a common concern of humankind, parties should, when taking action to address climate change, respect, promote and consider their respective obligations on human rights, the right to health, the rights of indigenous peoples, local communities, migrants, children, persons with disabilities and people in vulnerable situations and the right to development, as well as gender equality, empowerment of women and intergenerational equity. (Decision 1/CP.26)

This sweeping clause re-integrated human rights into the UNFCCC discourse (after their absence from the Katowice rulebook), framing them as guiding principles for implementation. Further, “repeated references to human rights, the rights of Indigenous peoples’ and gender equality, as well as the need for social and environmental safeguards” is noted (Evans *et al.*, 2021).

Further, the COP26 cover decision, emerged from extensive consultations with Heads of Delegation, characterised by significant debate over balanced representation of key elements: one of the main issues being loss and damage support (IISD Earth Negotiations Bulletin, 2021). Loss and damage was a high-profile, emotional issue at Glasgow, yet the outcomes left many wanting: ahead of COP26, developing countries led by the G77 made it clear they expected a

dedicated Loss Damage finance facility after years of delays (Franczak, 2022). During negotiations, Scotland made headlines by becoming the first developed nation to pledge funds (£2 million) specifically for loss and damage, a symbolic gesture raising pressure on others (Scottish Government News, 2023). While COP26 did not agree to a dedicated Loss and Damage Fund, it established the ‘Glasgow Dialogue’ to discuss funding arrangements (Bhandari *et al.*, 2025).

In its cover decision a section was devoted to loss and damage for the first time in a cover decision.⁴⁶³ Among other points, it was stressed that the importance of demand-driven technical assistance for capacity building is recognised, along with the progress in operationalising the Santiago network, which aims to address loss and damage due to climate change. Additionally, the need for coherent action and strengthened partnerships between different countries and organisations is emphasised to improve approaches in dealing with climate change impacts.⁴⁶⁴

As for Global Earth Stewardship norms, it was noted how the COP26 cover decision highlighted the importance of oceans and ecosystems for 'climate justice'.⁴⁶⁵ They recognise the importance of diverse climate observing systems—including atmospheric, oceanic, terrestrial, and cryosphere—and call for enhanced support for developing countries to implement these systems, along with the necessary data and monitoring frameworks.⁴⁶⁶ Emphasis is placed on technology's role in oceanic climate solutions and the integration of traditional knowledge and action for ocean-based climate strategies.⁴⁶⁷ In addition, COP26's text underscores the symbiotic relationship between biodiversity, ecosystems, and climate change, underlining the value of biodiversity in fostering resilience and lowering climate vulnerability through ecosystem-based methods.⁴⁶⁸ Sustainable development is mentioned multiple times, particularly in the context of the implementation of the *Glasgow Climate*

⁴⁶³ Decision 1/CP.26 Part VI

⁴⁶⁴ Decision 1/CP.26 Part VI Paragraphs 37-45

⁴⁶⁵ Decision 1/CP.26: Acknowledges the significant role of oceans in the climate system and the concept of climate justice. Further, Decision 16/CP.26 reiterates the same wordings, thus, mirroring Decision 1/CP.26.

⁴⁶⁶ Decision 1/CP.26, Paragraphs 58, 60, 61

⁴⁶⁷ See, Decision 1/CP.26

⁴⁶⁸ Just like the mention of ‘Oceans’, ‘biodiversity’ finds its place in this COP in Decision 1/CP.27, the need to “ensure integrity of all ecosystems” is stressed where biodiversity is mentioned too (as in Decision 1/CP.26 – same wordings are observed here)

Pact—and its intrinsic link for eradication of poverty, wellbeing of people, and Parities of developing countries.⁴⁶⁹

COP26 witnessed significant integration of biodiversity considerations within climate frameworks. The *Glasgow Leaders' Declaration on Forests and Land Use*, endorsed by over 130 nations representing 90 per cent of global forests, committed to reversing deforestation by 2030, supported by \$19.2 billion in pledged funding, including \$1.7 billion for indigenous forest tenure rights (Rannard and Gillett, 2021; Weston, 2021). Complementary initiatives addressed methane reduction and agricultural sustainability, consequently to the incorporation of methane emission reduction to be covered for the first time at a COP decision:

Invites parties to consider further actions to reduce by 2030 non-carbon dioxide greenhouse gas emissions, including methane; (Decision 1/CP.26 Part IV Mitigation Paragraph 19)

Moreover, the conference mandated a joint report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), institutionalising climate-biodiversity scientific integration (Pörtner *et al.*, 2021). The climate change-biodiversity nexus was supported by like movements like CAN International, rooting it to human rights and climate justice (CAN International Press, 2021).

Overall, COP26's cover decision reflected overlap among norms: the call for phasing down coal came “*recognizing the need for support towards a just transition*” marrying the anti-fossil-fuel agenda with equity for workers and communities. The human-rights and indigenous references reinforced the climate justice framing of adaptation and finance, while intergenerational equity and nature protection were presented as parallel moral imperatives. These inclusions were bolstered by broad advocacy: youth climate marches, Indigenous peoples' leadership (e.g. the first ever Indigenous Peoples' Pavilion at COP26), labour unions (pushing just transition), and climate justice networks all helped normalise this language.

7.1.4 COP27

The cover decision of COP27 is also called the *Sharm el-Sheikh Implementation Plan*—a single integrated document adopted as the COP's cover decision (1/CP.27) and in parallel by the

⁴⁶⁹ Decision 1/CP.26 Paragraph 52

CMA (1/CMA.4).⁴⁷⁰ The cover decision significantly deepened the integration of these already diffusing norms, influenced by a year of climate justice activism and geopolitical events. The COP was hosted by Egypt, and it came amid geopolitical turmoil (energy crisis, war in Ukraine) and mounting climate disasters (Horn of Africa drought, Pakistan floods). Negotiations for these overarching cover decisions took place in the Heads of Delegation meetings on 15, 17, 18, and 19 November 2022, facilitated by Wael Aboulmagd, Special Representative of the COP 27 President (IISD Earth Negotiations Bulletin, 2022).

COP27's outcomes included the milestone creation of a Loss and Damage Fund, but also disappointment on mitigation. Normatively, it advanced the climate justice agenda (through loss and damage), struggled with fossil fuel phase-out language, and raised concerns about human rights given the host context. Following COP26's breakthrough in aiding the diffusion of anti-fossil fuel norms, COP27 was expected to do the same; however, this failed to fully materialise—revealing the ongoing divide amongst parties. Such political “flinch” happened due to heightened energy security concerns amid volatile global markets, intensified by the war in Ukraine; entrenched economic interests of major fossil fuel producers benefiting from elevated prices; and the structural constraints of consensus-based UNFCCC negotiations, which enable a small number of resistant states, often backed by well-resourced fossil fuel lobbies, to dilute or block stronger language (Green and Asselt, 2022). This combination of geopolitical instability, vested economic interests, and procedural limitations led to a rollover of the COP26 text without the anticipated expansion to include oil and gas phase-out commitments.

COP27 cover decision thus had no further progress compared with COP26, as Paragraph 13 takes the same wording as Paragraph 20 of Decision 1/CP.26.⁴⁷¹ Hence, there is just one mention of ‘fossil fuels’ in COP27’s cover decision revealing the status quo sustained by parties’ political positions and negotiation dynamics of the UNFCCC process. India’s proposal to address all fossil fuels gained traction among over 80 countries (EU, SIDS, UK, etc.). India’s

⁴⁷⁰ Decision 1/CMA.4, under the Paris Agreement, is more operational, reaffirming Article 2 temperature goals (para. 7), mandating updated NDCs and long-term strategies by 2023 and launching the Mitigation Work Programme (paras. 17–28), advancing the *Global Goal on Adaptation* with structured reporting and finance (paras. 36–43), aligning finance flows with Article 2(1)(c) and operationalising the New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG) via the *Sharm el-Sheikh Dialogue* (paras. 54–68), setting deadlines for Biennial Transparency Reports and progressing the first Global Stocktake (paras. 72–77), and establishing a Just Transition Work Programme with annual ministerial dialogues (paras. 52–53).

⁴⁷¹ Decision 1/CP.27 Paragraph 13.

COP27 proposal to expand the *Glasgow Climate Pact*'s coal-specific language to cover *all* fossil fuels can be interpreted in four ways: firstly, that it was a *bona fide* equity-driven science-aligned strategy to combat climate crises (Pandey, 2022); secondly, to distribute mitigation responsibility more evenly by including oil and gas, which dominate developed economies' energy use; thirdly, as a defensive tactic to shield coal, by introducing a contentious expansion likely to face resistance from major oil and gas producers and thus stall stronger fossil fuel language; and finally, as a dual-purpose strategy combining genuine climate justice framing with calculated protection of national energy interests, reflecting the 'dual-track' bargaining common in climate diplomacy, to increase leverage, reduce risk, and maintain flexibility by keeping multiple options open. However, albeit an opportune time for international climate negotiations to advance anti-fossil fuel norms, the Egyptian presidency omitted it from drafts. Furthermore, while COP26 established a precedent for fossil fuel commitments through coal "phase down" language, COP27 failed to extend similar provisions to oil and gas. Instead, negotiators adopted ambiguous terminology committing to "enhancing a clean energy mix, including low-emission and renewable energy."⁴⁷² Such textual phrasing generated considerable concern as this formulation potentially legitimises expanded natural gas development based on its relatively lower carbon intensity compared to coal, thereby undermining comprehensive fossil fuel transition objectives (McGrath, 2022; Stallard, 2022). Moreover, COP27 was a missed opportunity, given that India proposed that all fossil fuels should be phased down demanding equity and justice in phasing down of all fossil fuels (including oil and gas), similar to what India demanded in COP26 (Chandrasekhar *et al.*, 2022); but the Egyptian presidency omitted it from drafts (Economic Times, 2022). Amidst this, the US played a 'blame-game' to point fingers at India framing India as the blockers of anti-fossil-fuel norms (Wu, 2021); even as the Biden administration was refusing to shut down new fossil fuel infrastructure (Friends of Earth, 2021, p. 257).

COP27 brought intergenerational equity to the forefront, stressing the need for inclusive action across all levels of society and highlighting the pivotal roles of diverse groups including women, children, youth, indigenous peoples, and local communities.⁴⁷³ In the same excerpt from the Cover Decision, the incorporation of the right to a healthy environment⁴⁷⁴ links it to broader themes such as human rights, intergenerational equity, and sufficiency norms.

⁴⁷² Decision 1/CP.27 Part III Energy Paragraph 10

⁴⁷³ Decision 1/CP.27

⁴⁷⁴ Decision 1/CP.27

Moreover, the mention of ‘future generations’ comes in for the first time⁴⁷⁵ - even as intergenerational equity is stressed. Notably, for the first time ever at a COP, there was a dedicated *Children and Youth Pavilion* in the official venue. This space, led by youth organizations, became a vibrant hub for young activists to convene events, dialogues with policymakers, and media interactions. In addition, there was a cognitive dissonance—agreeing to the idea of intergenerational justice while delaying action—fuelled even more youth activism post-COP27, including legal avenues like the youth-driven effort at the UN General Assembly for an ICJ opinion (which succeeded in late 2022).⁴⁷⁶

The mention of climate justice from the cover decision of COP26 is largely mirrored in COP27; nevertheless, I note how COP27 cover decision did so without the Glasgow caveat of “for some,” before mentioning climate justice—indicating a broader acceptance of the term.⁴⁷⁷ Such surgical removal of the text and making the term applicable for broader population(s) and reasons enhances the normativity of the same. Further, the way COP27 advance climate justice and equity narratives is through diverse normative overlaps. One key textual incorporation of such normative discourse is seen essentially in embedding the just transition principle across all action. In a first, the decision also established a *Work Programme on Just Transition* (UNFCCC, 2023)—to discuss pathways for an equitable shift from high-carbon systems, from COP28 onward (Chandrasekhar *et al.*, 2022). International Trade Union Confederation hailed this stating that the COP27 cover decision asserting that the “just transition is founded on social dialogue”⁴⁷⁸ was a major step forward (Chandrasekhar *et al.*, 2022). It is also important to recognise how the very achievement of the loss and damage fund is a manifestation of climate justice: a recognition of the polluter pays principle and support for those least responsible—where explicit overlaps of normative frames through this decision, is witnessed. By 2022, climate justice had moved closer to the mainstream, thanks to sustained civil society pressure and endorsements by a wide range of countries.

With respect to human rights norm, the only mention of ‘human rights’ in the COP27 Cover Decision happens in the same wording as that which was referred in COP26:

⁴⁷⁵ Decision 1/CP.27 Paragraph 55

⁴⁷⁶ Read more, *Chapter 4 Section 4.3.4*

⁴⁷⁷ Decision 1/CP.27 and Decision 1/CP.26 has the same wordings for the Paragraph where “climate justice” is mentioned.

⁴⁷⁸ Decision 1/CP.27 Part VIII. Implementation – pathways to just transition - Paragraph 28.

Acknowledging that climate change is a common concern of humankind, parties should, when taking action to address climate change, respect, promote and consider their respective obligations on human rights, the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, the right to health, the rights of indigenous peoples, local communities, migrants, children, persons with disabilities and people in vulnerable situations and the right to development, as well as gender equality, empowerment of women and intergenerational equity,⁴⁷⁹

At COP27, the intersection of human rights and climate justice was reinforcing the indispensability of multilateral cooperation in the climate crisis.⁴⁸⁰ Further, notably, the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment—which had been recognised by the UN General Assembly Resolution 76/300 in 2022 was mentioned for the first time in a COP decision. This was a “win” for climate activists and civil society (IISD Earth Negotiations Bulletin, 2022, p. 32) and hailed by observers as a breakthrough for the human-rights norms (Chandrasekhar *et al.*, 2022). Note, in Chapter 6 an interviewee⁴⁸¹ mentioned the efforts of Slovenia in getting this human right incorporated in the COP27 text.⁴⁸² In similar vein, an interviewee observes the following;

We're seeing the right to a healthy and clean environment now being introduced from the Human Rights Council through the UN General Assembly, and also in the cover decision from Sharm El Sheikh. We're seeing this develop, and I think it is useful to interrogate to what extent it is the voices from civil society and other actors influencing governments' positions in the negotiating process. With environmental issues in general, governments are not only looking at their economic interests in terms of how they set out their positions. We have to recognise that there is a lot of influence coming from interest groups to push specific narratives and normative framing for how climate change responses can be more impactful. That discussion is evolving. (Interview with IP11)

Here, it the “evolving” part is best described by another interviewee who is a UN official and have been in the UNFCCC COP negotiations for more than a decade:

It has essentially been accepted as an addition to the Paris Agreement preamble list of enumerated rights. If you look at [...] the loss and damage fund decision,⁴⁸³ and the Just Transition decision,⁴⁸⁴ their preambles all have the Paris Agreement preamble

⁴⁷⁹ Decision 1/CP.27 (with emphasis)

⁴⁸⁰ Decision 1/CP.27: The *Sharm el-Sheikh Implementation Plan*; COP discusses the Decision by recalling the decisions 1/CP.19, 1/CP.20, 1/CP.21, 1/CP.22, 1/CP.23, 1/CP.24, 1/CP.25 and 1/CP.26; further, noting decision 1/CMA.4;

⁴⁸¹ Interview with IP03

⁴⁸² Chapter 6; Section 6.1.2

⁴⁸³ See Decision 1/CP.28

⁴⁸⁴ See Decision 3/CMA.5

language plus the right to a healthy environment. What are the impacts of that? I think that's a little tougher to say. There is obviously a rhetorical import to it, but whether it fundamentally changes the way people are acting or behaving is a different question. Frankly, we are pushing. [It] was integrated into the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and the CBD COP 15 outcome. It was integrated into the Global Chemicals Framework⁴⁸⁵ adopted last year. We've been pushing in all of those places. There is an ongoing discussion now under the Council of Europe about a potential mechanism for the right to a healthy environment. There is also an ongoing discussion in ASEAN about a new environmental rights framework. [...] I think there is a lot more litigation. [...] The idea really was that recognition doesn't create a right... [w]hat we're talking about is what we can do in terms of creating tools to better monitor and implement those rights. Integration in COP outcomes will help facilitate that. (Interview with IP03)

In addition to the repeated justice-centric normative frames throughout the cover decision, notably the right to health, right to development, persons with disabilities and more;⁴⁸⁶ “food” was mentioned for the first time:

Recognizing the fundamental priority of safeguarding food security and ending hunger, and the particular vulnerabilities of food production systems to the adverse impacts of climate change, (Decision 1/CP.27 Preamble)

As such, strategic normative overlaps are recorded where human right norms, climate justice norms, GES norms, and sufficiency as a principled idea cluster together. Amidst escalating food prices, conflict-disrupted commodity supplies, weather-impacted crop yields, and unprecedented hunger levels, agriculture and food security emerged as anticipated priorities at COP27: hence, *The Koronivia Joint Work for Agriculture* received a four-year extension as parties committed to continued implementation of climate action on agriculture and food security (UNFCCC, no date. c).

One of the main progresses (if not the main progress) achieved during COP27 is on Loss and Damage making a decades-old moral claim a concrete reality. The discourse on Loss and Damage at COP27 intensified with decisions deeply acknowledging the profound and escalating impacts of Loss and Damage worldwide and the need for comprehensive, multi-level cooperation.⁴⁸⁷ In the cover decision, Loss and Damage is mentioned six times in Sub-Section VII across Paras 25-28, noting the increasing severity and costs to economies,

⁴⁸⁵ See Global Chemicals Framework was brought forth by UNEP (2023c)

⁴⁸⁶ Decision 1/CP.27 (with emphasis)

⁴⁸⁷ See Decision 1/CP.27

communities, and human mobility due to climate impacts.⁴⁸⁸ Moreover, the operationalisation of funding for Loss and Damage, including the Santiago Network's capacity-building role, was stressed.⁴⁸⁹ COP27 achieved consensus on establishing a loss and damage fund following three decades of advocacy by small island states and developing nations. The breakthrough emerged after protracted negotiations between developed countries and the G77 plus China coalition (Chandrasekhar *et al.*, 2022). A final text⁴⁹⁰ was negotiated near the summit's conclusion, formally deciding to create the new financial mechanism for climate-related losses and damages, but with a broader contributor base (Farand, Lo and Darby, 2022; Harvey, Morton and Greenfield, 2022).

On Global Earth Stewardship norms, COP27 cover decision underscores the importance of capacity-building in Earth observation systems for effective climate change response.⁴⁹¹ It reiterates the significance of ecosystem integrity, including oceans, emphasising their role as carbon sinks and in biodiversity conservation.⁴⁹² Also, of the interconnected linkage with climate justice:

Noting the importance of ensuring the integrity of all ecosystems, including in forests, the ocean and the cryosphere, and the protection of biodiversity, recognized by some cultures as Mother Earth, and also noting the importance of 'climate justice', when taking action to address climate change. (Decision 1/CP.27)

The conference encourages the integration of ocean-based actions into national climate strategies, informed by dialogues focused exclusively on the oceans.⁴⁹³ Collectively, COP25 through COP27 has progressively acknowledged the ocean's key role in climate balance, promoting technological advances, climate-resilient agriculture, and coastal management, with a special focus on aiding developing nations in these areas. Further, COP27 recognises the importance of biodiversity as a cornerstone of the Paris Agreement, essential for ecosystem resilience, food security, and climate action, with an emphasis on international collaboration.⁴⁹⁴ Moreover, for the first time, "nature-based solutions" was explicitly mentioned in a COP decision:

⁴⁸⁸ Decision 1/CP.27's Sub-Section VII – in Paragraphs 25, 26, 27, and 28

⁴⁸⁹ Decision 1/CP.27: Funding and capacity-building for Loss and Damage

⁴⁹⁰ Draft Decision – CP.27/CMA.4

⁴⁹¹ Decision 1/CP.27

⁴⁹² Decision 1/CP.27, Paragraph 21

⁴⁹³ Decision 1/CP.27, Paragraphs 49, 50, and Decision 22/CP.27, Paragraph 3

⁴⁹⁴ Decision 1/CP.27, Paragraphs 1 and 18; Here in this Decision 'biodiversity' is mentioned thrice.

Encourages parties to consider, as appropriate, nature-based solutions or ecosystem-based approaches, taking into consideration United Nations Environment Assembly Resolution 5/5, for their mitigation and adaptation action while ensuring relevant social and environmental safeguards; (Decision 1/CP.27 Part XIV Forest Paragraph 48)

The text refers to nature-based solutions in the context of ecosystem approaches for mitigation and adaptation (this was the first time the phrase appeared in a UNFCCC cover decision, indicating a normative shift to open endorsement). The United Nations Environment Assembly Resolution 5/5 is about nature-based solutions for supporting sustainable development (UNEP, 2022). Here, an interviewee who is also a negotiator, shared her experience in serving as a crucial intermediary between International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and formal UNFCCC processes to secure nature-based solutions references in COP27's Sharm El Sheikh cover decision.⁴⁹⁵ When IUCN representatives arrived at COP seeking inclusion of nature-based solutions language but lacking procedural knowledge, they approached the interviewee for guidance. The interviewee provided comprehensive strategic counsel, explaining that successful norm insertion required: (1) drafting specific textual proposals for state consideration, (2) identifying and cultivating supportive state allies willing to champion the concept, and (3) securing formal plenary introduction through these state partners. Together, they developed a systematic advocacy strategy that successfully resulted in the first explicit mention of nature-based solutions in the Sharm El Sheikh cover decision, with subsequent references appearing in Dubai's COP28 decisions (IUCN, 2025). This collaboration illustrates how expert knowledge of multilateral procedures enables civil society organisations to translate normative preferences into formal diplomatic outcomes through strategic alliance-building and procedural navigation.

Further, in a normative overlap of Global Earth Stewardship norms, climate justice, anti-fossil fuel norms, and sufficiency as a principled idea, “tipping points” were also recorded for the first time in COP27 cover decision:

Recognizes the impact of climate change on the cryosphere and the need for further understanding of these impacts, including of tipping points;⁴⁹⁶

COP27 notes how the “importance of transitioning to sustainable lifestyles and sustainable patterns of consumption and production in efforts to address climate change” is held central.⁴⁹⁷

⁴⁹⁵ Interview with IP04

⁴⁹⁶ Decision 1/CP.27 Part I Science and Urgency Paragraph 5

⁴⁹⁷ Decision 1/CP.27

In sum, it can be understood that the *Sharm el-Sheikh Implementation Plan* reflects a consolidation of justice-oriented normative discourses: climate justice, intergenerational equity, the right to a healthy environment—marking COP27 as a moment of deepening, rather than diffusion, of norms previously in circulation. Some long-advocated norms, such as loss and damage financing and nature-based solutions (of GES norms), finally achieved textual recognition after decades of mobilisation by small island states and transnational advocacy networks, exemplifying the impact of persistent norm entrepreneurship. Others, particularly anti-fossil fuel commitments, stagnated or were diluted, with ambiguous language on “low-emission energy” signalling both resistance from powerful interests and the strategic omissions of the host presidency. Climate movements played an instrumental role: youth activism catalysed new institutional forms (e.g., Children and Youth Pavilion), and sustained civil society pressure helped integrate rights-based language, including the UNGA-recognised right to a clean and healthy environment. Simultaneously, the formal texts’ selective uptake of norms reveals a negotiation arena shaped by power asymmetries, state interests, and procedural bottlenecks. What emerges is not a linear normative progression, but a layered and often contested terrain—where the rhetorical incorporation of justice and rights increasingly coexists with structural inertia. Yet, through strategic alliances and procedural literacy, actors outside formal delegations are progressively shaping the grammar of multilateral climate governance.

7.1.5 COP28

The cover decision of COP28 is called the *UAE Consensus*. Unlike previous COPs where the cover decisions were usually encapsulated in a single document (or related documents mirroring COP, CMA, and CMP), the *UAE Consensus* was composed of multiple decisions adopted across both the COP and the CMA (the Conference of Parties to the Paris Agreement).⁴⁹⁸ For example, at COP28 the parties adopted decisions on topics such as a new *Youth Climate Champion*, the first Global Stocktake outcome, a new *Just Transition Work Programme*, continued mitigation ambition, the *Global Goal on Adaptation*, and the new Loss and Damage fund—each as separate decisions under the COP and/or CMA. Together, these coordinated decisions constitute the *UAE Consensus*.

The *UAE Consensus* was thus split into multiple decisions to reflect the dual governance under the Convention and the Paris Agreement, and the distinct legal contexts of certain outcomes. Some core outcomes of COP28 fell under the mandate of the Paris Agreement’s CMA: for

⁴⁹⁸ See *Chapter 3 Methodology* to explore the different documents used for Discourse Analysis.

instance, the Global Stocktake (a Paris Agreement process) was concluded in a CMA decision (Decision 4/CMA.5) rather than a COP decision. Likewise, the new Loss and Damage Fund required action by both bodies: Decision 1/CP.28 and a parallel Decision 5/CMA.5 operationalised the fund, ensuring endorsement by parties to both the Convention and Paris Agreement. In contrast, earlier COPs often issued a single omnibus cover decision under the COP (with a mirror decision under CMA when needed) containing all political elements. For example, COP26’s *Glasgow Climate Pact* was issued primarily as one document (Decision 1/CP.26, mirrored by 1/CMA.3). The COP28 Presidency took an approach both to navigate complex negotiations and thus splitting the *UAE Consensus* into thematic decisions, each could be negotiated in its proper forum and legal framework (Convention or Paris Agreement), then presented as one collective “consensus.” This reflects an institutional logic: issues specific to Paris Agreement commitments (like the *Global Stocktake*) had to be adopted in the CMA, whereas cross-cutting or Convention-based items could be in COP decisions—yet all are politically linked.

The very fact of what constitutes as a cover decision in UNFCCC COP28 is disputed. There are popular views that the Global Stocktake alone was the Cover Decision (with mirrored 1/CMA.5), and/or “*the Operationalization of the new funding arrangements, including a fund, for responding to loss and damage referred to in paragraphs 2–3 of decisions 2/CP.27 and 2/CMA.4*” 1/CP.28 (with mirrored Decision 5/CMA.5). I, however, consider *UAE consensus* as the cover decision, for the purposes of the thesis—to posit a wholesome argument on normativity and political dynamics within and outside of COP negotiations.

COP28 marked a historic shift by explicitly acknowledging the need to move beyond fossil fuels: a norm long advocated by scientists and activists. For the first time, the COP’s final text calls on all countries to:

Transition[ing] away from fossil fuels in energy systems, in a just, orderly and equitable manner, accelerating action in this critical decade, so as to achieve net zero by 2050 in keeping with the science. (Decision 1/CMA.5 Part II-A Paragraph 28(d))

Further, the text acknowledges “phasing out inefficient fossil fuel subsidies that do not address energy poverty or just transitions, as soon as possible”⁴⁹⁹—incorporating the ‘phase down’ as opposed to ‘phase-out’ of unabated coal: “accelerating efforts towards the phase-down of unabated coal power.”⁵⁰⁰ The inclusion of phrases like “just, orderly and equitable” reflects

⁴⁹⁹ Decision 1/CMA.5 Paragraph 28 (h)

⁵⁰⁰ Decision 1/CMA.5 Paragraph 28 (b)

concern for fairness in the transition, aligning normative overlaps with climate justice norms and prioritising just transition, especially for developing countries. There have been mounting critiques over the language, describing the outcome as a compromise loopholes. The decision stops short of using the strongest terms – it omits any explicit mandate to “phase out” or even “phase down” oil, gas, and coal, instead urging an undefined transition away from fossil fuels (Morton *et al.*, 2023). Many vulnerable nations and civil society groups—over 130 countries, scientists and NGOs—had urged a clear coal, oil and gas phase-out going into Dubai, and were frustrated that the final text only ambiguously gestures toward that goal (Morton *et al.*, 2023). It is noted how in the draft text the inclusion of phasing out of fossil fuels was well incorporated (Ward, 2023). However, when the cover text came out on 13 December 2023, the mention of fossil fuel and unabated coal came only in Paragraph 28—indicating the continued political negotiations between diverse interests amongst parties.

Here, albeit acknowledging the textual incorporation of “transitioning away from fossil fuels”, an interviewee who is negotiator from a Small Island Developing State emphasised the need to highlight the moral component in these norm inclusions:

[F]inally, a phrase like transitioning away from fossil fuels was included in the cover decision [...] for the first time. What I suppose we would be interested in is [kind of the moral] the moral component of this argument (Interview with IP11)

Here, the negotiator's emphasis on the "moral component" highlights a critical tension: while procedural inclusion represents institutional progress, the normative power of climate commitments depends on their capacity to mobilise moral and ethical imperatives rather than merely technical compliance. This observation suggests that textual incorporation, while necessary, may be insufficient for norm operationalisation without accompanying moral frameworks that can drive behavioral change. The gap between normative aspiration (phase-out demands state parties) and diplomatic outcome (ambiguous transition language), despite complex negotiation dynamics where norm contestation by parties championing and blocking norms is prevalent, illustrates how cover decisions can also dilute normative clarity even while implying incremental progress.

The term ‘intergenerational equity’ occurs once, albeit ‘youth’ is mentioned thrice, and ‘children’ five times.⁵⁰¹ The Decision -/CMA highlights the importance of inclusive participation in addressing the climate crisis, for instance, Paragraph 9 reaffirms that solutions

⁵⁰¹ Decision 1/CMA; “children” mentioned specifically in Paragraph 9, 178, 182; “youth” mentioned in paragraph 9, 158, 178.

must involve meaningful dialogue with all stakeholders, including youth and children, underscoring their role in the transition to low-emission, climate-resilient development. Paragraph 158 acknowledges the significant contributions of non-Party stakeholders, including youth, in advancing the goals of the Paris Agreement and enhancing climate action. Paragraph 178 calls for gender-responsive climate policies along with policies that fully respects human rights and empower youth and children, while Paragraph 182 requests an expert dialogue by the Subsidiary Body for Implementation on the unique impacts of climate change on children and seeks policy solutions.

Further 'future generation' is mentioned in Paragraph 61, where importance of global solidarity in undertaking adaptation efforts is stressed.⁵⁰² Decision 1/CMA.5 establishes the "Presidency youth climate champion" where the agency of youth and children 'as agents of change', is formalised.⁵⁰³ The mandate is of the youth climate champion is to amplifying the work of youth-led and youth-focused organizations within the COP process. COP28's presidency itself appointed a Youth Climate Champion, and parties decided that henceforth a youth representative (aged 18–35) will be appointed for up to a two-year term for each COP presidency to "facilitate the enhancement of meaningful, inclusive engagement of youth in climate action [...]"⁵⁰⁴

When 'human rights' is mentioned in the COP28 cover decision in preambular sections, it has the same wordings as used in COP26 and COP27. However, there are a couple of further mentions.⁵⁰⁵ The *Global Goal on Adaptation*⁵⁰⁶ was a progress at COP28, internalising different social economic and cultural rights.⁵⁰⁷ Paragraph 63, for instance, calls for parties and non-party stakeholders to elevate ambition and boost adaptation efforts in line with global agreements, aiming for significant advancements by 2030 and beyond in various areas—reducing climate-induced water scarcity, achieving climate-resilient food production and access, enhancing health resilience against climate impacts, mitigating climate effects on ecosystems through nature-based solutions (NbS), improving the resilience of infrastructure and settlements, diminishing climate change's impact on poverty and livelihoods, and

⁵⁰² Decision 1/CMA Paragraph 61 and Decision FCCC/PA/CMA/2023/L.18 Paragraph 8

⁵⁰³ Decision 16/CP.28 and 21/CMA.5.

⁵⁰⁴ Decision 16/CP.28 and 21/CMA.5 - Paragraphs 6,10, 11, 12

⁵⁰⁵ Decision 1/CMA.5 Paragraph 178; Decision 1/CP.28 and 5/CMA.5 Preamble; Decision 1/CMA.5 Preamble; Decision 3/CMA.5 Preamble; Decision FCCC/PA/CMA/2023/L.18 Paragraph 13

⁵⁰⁶ Decision 1/CMA.5 Paragraph 43-65

⁵⁰⁷ See Decision 1/CMA.5 Paragraphs 63 and 64.

protecting cultural heritage through adaptive strategies and climate-resilient infrastructure, incorporating traditional and indigenous knowledge. Paragraph 64, further brings out that the framework for the *Global Goal on Adaptation* sets out targets across the iterative adaptation cycle, aimed at bolstering adaptation actions and support.

Further Paragraph 6 specifically points to the common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities (CBRD-RC), as well as the national contexts for sustainable development and eradication of poverty⁵⁰⁸—pointing to the need to for progressive realisation of human rights in the progression of climate action. Poverty eradication has been stressed multiple times throughout the cover decision.

Moreover, an interviewee pointed out:

If you look at the *Loss and Damage Fund* decision, and the *Just Transition* decision, their preambles all include the Paris Agreement’s preamble language along with the right to a healthy environment. What are the impacts of that? I think that’s a little harder to say. There is obviously a rhetorical significance to it, but whether it fundamentally changes the way people act or behave is another question. Frankly, we are pushing. (Interview with IP03).

Here, the cover decisions prove how in the *UAE consensus* (in Decision 3/CMA.5 - United Arab Emirates just transition work programme; Decisions 1/CP.28 and 5/CMA.5 - Operationalization of the new funding arrangements (Loss and Damage)) follow the Paris Agreement language with the addition of right to a clean healthy and sustainable environment. This amounts to, and demonstrates, the normative advancements and gains of human rights norms in climate negotiations.

Climate justice is mentioned just once in the whole of *UAE consensus*.⁵⁰⁹ It could also be noted that the mention of climate justice from the cover decision of COP26 is repeated in COP27 reflecting same wordings in the respective paragraphs—but when it comes to COP28, there is an addition of a word in the same paragraph: ‘Noting the importance of ensuring the integrity of [...] mountains [...] and also noting the importance of ‘climate justice’, when taking action to address climate change’.⁵¹⁰ The additional word in the paragraph, is “mountains”—here, it is analysed how Global Earth Stewardship norms closely align with climate justice norms. Such

⁵⁰⁸ Decision 1/CMA Paragraph 6

⁵⁰⁹ Decision 1/CMA.5 Preamble

⁵¹⁰ Decision 1/CP.27, Decision 1/CP.26 and Decision 1/CMA has the same wordings for the Paragraph where “climate justice” is mentioned.

addition for “mountains” can be attributed to norm championing of Kyrgyz Republic, Bhutan, and Nepal.⁵¹¹

With respect to the Global Earth Stewardship norms, the cover decisions of COP28 incorporates the textual references to ocean, mountain and biodiversity; primarily in Paragraph 33 where the text also mentions on the *Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework* which was operationalised at the 15th Conference of Parties (COP15) to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) on 19 December 2022. This implies the complementarity of the different environmental goals which are mutually reinforcing under the multifaceted risks in the planetary crisis. Moreover, earth stewardship is implicitly mentioned, where there is an invitation to: “Parties to preserve and restore oceans and coastal ecosystems and scale up, as appropriate, ocean-based mitigation action”⁵¹² and further “notes that ecosystem-based approaches, including ocean-based adaptation and resilience measures, as well as in mountain regions, can reduce a range of climate change risks and provide multiple co-benefits.”⁵¹³ There is explicit mention on biodiversity, mountain, nature-based solutions⁵¹⁴ and such too—which amounts to much progress, as in the internalisation of earth stewardship norms in the climate negotiations. Mountains are again highlighted in other areas of the cover decision.⁵¹⁵ However, it is worth noting here that some items, such as one on ‘mountains and climate change’ were removed from the agenda, with the presidency promising they would be taken up elsewhere (Chandrasekhar *et al.*, 2023).

The COP28 cover decision does not explicitly provide any trends on sufficiency as a principled idea, however, it can be observed how living within planetary boundaries were implicitly recorded:

Notes the importance of transitioning to sustainable lifestyles and sustainable patterns of consumption and production in efforts to address climate change, including through circular economy approaches, and encourages efforts in this regard; (Decision 1/CMA Paragraph 36)

In addition, the cover decision emphasises land use—where “multi-sectoral solutions, such as land-use management, sustainable agriculture, resilient food systems, nature-based solutions

⁵¹¹ See *Chapter 6 – Section: 6.1.1.6 Global Earth Stewardship norms*

⁵¹² Decision 1/CMA Paragraph 35

⁵¹³ Decision 1/CMA Paragraph 56

⁵¹⁴ Decision 1/CMA Paragraph 63 (d)

⁵¹⁵ Decision 16/CP.28 and 21/CMA.5 Annex II – Preamble; Decision 1/CMA.5 in Paragraph 55, 56, 63 (d), 181; Decision FCCC/PA/CMA/2023/L.18 Paragraph 9 (d)

and ecosystem-based approaches, and protecting, conserving and restoring nature and ecosystems...”⁵¹⁶ are encouraged.

Sufficiency aims to prevent crossing tipping points by encouraging restraint and balance, hence the importance of “tipping points” have been gaining traction recently – as a normative frame that clusters norms together, primarily GES norms, climate justice norms, sufficiency, and anti-fossil fuel norms. Nevertheless, unlike building on COP27’s reference to tipping points (which I observe as more aligned to the principle of sufficiency in COP27 cover decision), COP28 records it in different words (under the section of “Loss and Damage”):

Recognizes that improved understanding of how to avoid and respond to the risk of low-likelihood or high-impact events or outcomes, such as abrupt changes and potential *tipping points*, as well as more knowledge, support, policy and action are needed to comprehensively manage risks of and respond to loss and damage associated with climate change impacts; (Decision 1/CMA.5 Paragraph 127; emphasis added)

A new report, contributed by more than 200 researchers across the globe, was published on 6 December (Lenton *et al.*, 2023); warning that Earth system tipping points have put the planet on a havoc, the “tipping points” did not reappear in COP28 *UAE Consensus*. The authors of the report highlighted the need for promoting “positive social tipping points” across socio-behavioural, technological, economic, and political domains represents the sole viable systemic risk management approach for mitigating climate risks. The report identifies numerous positive tipping points already achieved, including renewable energy achieving cost competitiveness in certain nations and electric vehicles capturing dominant market positions in others.

Loss and Damage is extensively covered in the cover decision of COP28. It first appears in Paragraph 12, where it:

Also urge developed country parties to continue to provide support and encourage other parties to provide, or continue to provide support, on a voluntary basis, for activities to address loss and damage; (Decision 1/CP28 Paragraph 12)

Moreover, in the footnote of Paragraph 88 it is stressed that there will be no prejudice to any future funding arrangements, any positions of parties in current or future negotiations, or understandings and interpretations of the Convention and the Paris Agreement.

Additionally, the cover decision includes an entire section dedicated to Loss and Damage, spanning Paragraphs 121 to 135. The Loss and Damage Fund was operationalised on the first day of the COP28 negotiations, November 30th, 2023. It was acknowledged in the final text

⁵¹⁶ Decision 1/CMA Paragraph 55

that the Paris Agreement, especially Article 8 highlight the criticality of addressing climate change impacts, focusing on mitigating loss and damage. This involves recognizing the vulnerability of certain countries and communities due to various factors,⁵¹⁷ and the progress of international initiatives like the *Warsaw International Mechanism* and the *Santiago Network* in tackling these challenges.⁵¹⁸ The agreement acknowledges the escalating losses and damages due to climate change⁵¹⁹ and emphasizes the need for comprehensive understanding and response strategies, particularly for high-impact events.⁵²⁰ It also points out substantial financial gaps in effectively responding to climate-related impacts,⁵²¹ calling for urgent and enhanced action, especially under existing mechanisms.⁵²² The agreement underscores the importance of coherence in disaster risk reduction, humanitarian assistance, and climate-related migration.⁵²³ Additionally placing emphasis on transparent reporting for monitoring progress in addressing climate impacts.⁵²⁴ Finally, it encourages developing countries to seek technical assistance to enhance their response to climate change,⁵²⁵ underlining a collective responsibility in this global endeavour.

In sum, the *UAE Consensus* reflects both a normative juncture and a continuation of strategic norm contestation within the UNFCCC process. The explicit mention of "transitioning away from fossil fuels" for the first time signals a breakthrough in normalising the long-contested anti-fossil fuel norms, albeit through compromised, ambiguous language that sidesteps enforceable commitments: revealing the structural influence of fossil fuel interests and geopolitical constraints—compromising moral imperatives of movements and TANs. In contrast, norms around loss and damage, intergenerational equity, and earth stewardship achieved deeper textual norm consolidation, aided by sustained advocacy from vulnerable states, expert networks, and civil society actors. However, climate justice—though still present—was more rhetorically diluted compared to earlier COPs, and sufficiency norms, while implied through calls for sustainable consumption and lifestyle changes, remained largely underdeveloped. The formalisation of youth agency through the Youth Climate

⁵¹⁷ Decision 1/CMA Paragraph 121

⁵¹⁸ Decision 1/CMA Paragraph 124

⁵¹⁹ Decision 1/CMA Paragraph 126

⁵²⁰ Decision 1/CMA Paragraph 127

⁵²¹ Decision 1/CMA Paragraph 128

⁵²² Decision 1/CMA Paragraph 130

⁵²³ Decision 1/CMA Paragraph 131

⁵²⁴ Decision 1/CMA Paragraphs 132 - 134

⁵²⁵ Decision 1/CMA Paragraph 135

Champion and the continued integration of the right to a healthy environment illustrate a strengthening of rights-based and participatory normative frames—yet their transformative potential depends on how these roles evolve beyond symbolism. Overall, COP28 consolidated previously diffused norms into formal texts (however, given its length and multiple documents—it failed to evoke a greater normative shift as anticipated by the movements); further, the scope and clarity of these incorporations reveal the tension between procedural inclusion and normative ambition. While civil society and epistemic communities shaped important discursive shifts, especially around tipping points and just transitions, the COP28 outcomes reaffirm that norm progression remains contingent on both political alignments and the moral framing capacities of diverse norm entrepreneurs.

7.2 Conclusion: Patterns of Embedded Normative Discourses

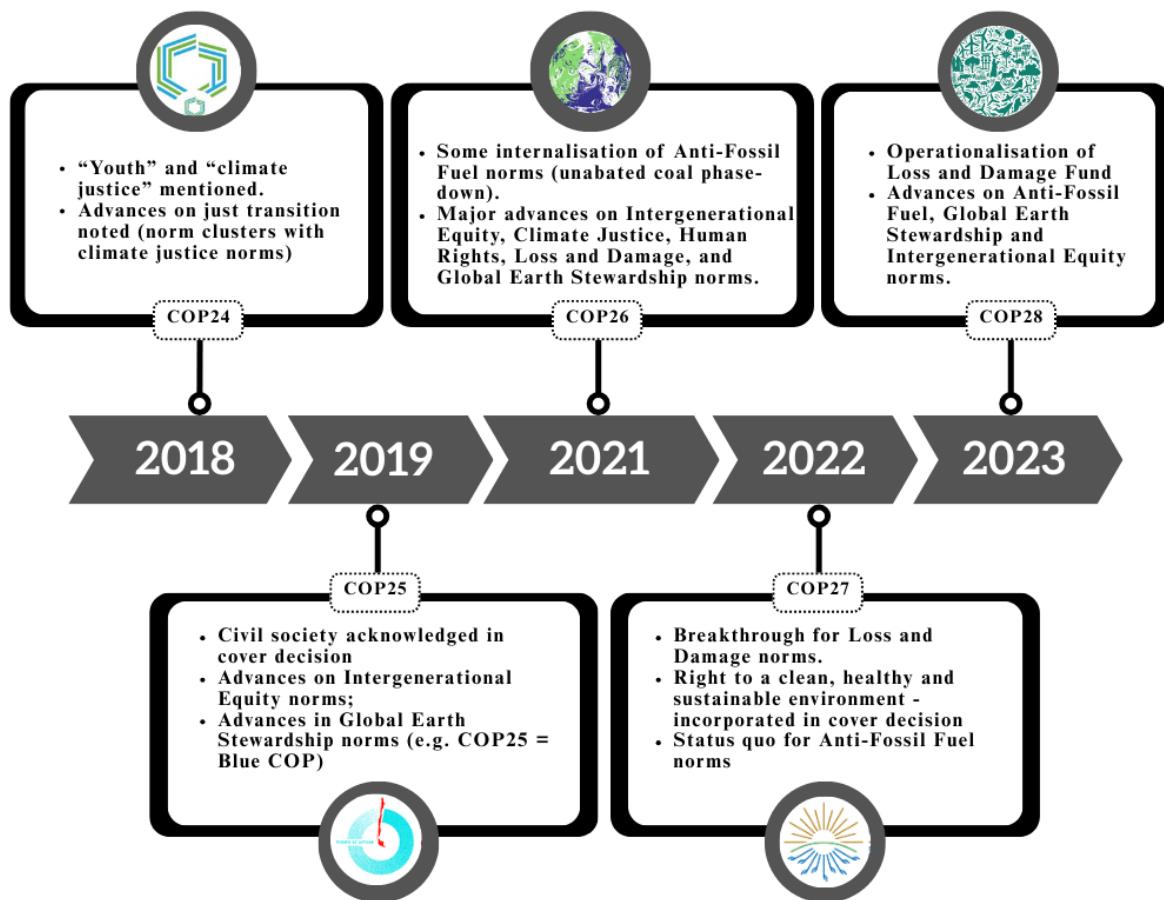


Figure 7.1: Patterns of Embedded Normative Discourses across COP24-28 (Created by Susan Ann Samuel)

From COP24 to COP28, an identifiable, though uneven, trajectory of embedding normative discourses in the UNFCCC cover decisions is analysed. When procedurally, the cover

decisions have evolved from single-text political declarations to fragmented but thematically structured consensus texts—their function as vehicles that record normativity is contested, though arguably have intensified (as noted in Section 7.2.5 – with COP28). I learn that COPs are complex arenas of overlapping normative contestations—across norms, norm clusters, normative frames, actors, and structures—highlighting the dynamic interplay that drives norm consolidation, transformation, or resistance.

Normative discourses around climate justice, human rights, intergenerational equity, and anti-fossil fuel norms have gained visibility, albeit in varied rhetorical strength and political-legal precision; i.e., with domestic legal implications (like some human rights), or hinging on political will (like anti-fossil fuel norms on pursuits for Net Zero, emissions reductions, transition to renewable energy etc). COP26 marked a pivotal normative moment with the first explicit mention of fossil fuels, whereas COP27 and COP28 reflected broader—if diluted) normative shifts; with an uptake of climate justice and just transition normative frames. Meanwhile, nature-based solutions as expressions of Global Earth Stewardship norms, and the right to a healthy environment as a human rights norm—progressively moved from advocacy to incorporation, reflecting successful norm entrepreneurship by civil society and expert coalitions. However, terms like "climate justice" in its embedded form (as opposed to its normative frame): often remained hedged ("for some") or singular/isolated in being incorporated in just one Paragraph. Sufficiency as a principled frame, though implicit in references to sustainable lifestyles and tipping points, remains conceptually marginal; and since it is not a norm yet, as a principled idea it is having traction and shifting normative discourses.

Movements, especially youth, Indigenous, and transnational advocacy networks, have played catalytic roles in shaping discourse, pressuring negotiators, and creating procedural porosity through which new norms can enter formal texts. Yet, the durability and operationalisation of these norms depend not merely on their textual presence but on their moral framing and institutional incorporation to operational texts. Overall, the cover decisions between COP24 and COP28 illustrate a shift from mere technical outputs to contested sites of political spaces where movements have gained discursive leverage, but where entrenched geopolitical and economic interests continue to limit transformative change—where the moral power of climate movements and the normative frames it evokes are challenged. The cover decisions thus serve as mirrors of both progress and paralysis, often recording the highly complex, nuanced and dynamic nature of politics in climate negotiations—marking the uneven but evolving normative framework amidst climate crisis.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

The central aim of this thesis has been to study how global norms advocated by climate movements influence the international climate negotiations at the UNFCCC COPs. In pursuit of this question, the study bridged the gap in existing research by moving beyond quantitative analysis through Twitter(X) data, as in the paper by Nisbett and Spaiser, (2023) to examine direct impacts on negotiators and negotiation outcomes. Three interrelated sub-research questions guided the analysis: (1) Which global norms advanced by transnational climate advocacy groups and movements are referenced in international climate negotiations? (2) How do these referenced global norms influence negotiations and agreements? and (3) Who are the norm champions advocating these norms, and who are the norm antipreneurs blocking them during negotiations?

To address these questions, the thesis employed a qualitative study. Twenty semi-structured expert interviews with UNFCCC negotiators, officials, and observers provided insider perspectives on normative discourse and agency within the negotiations (Chapter 4, 5, and 6). In parallel, a discourse analysis of COP cover decisions (COP24–COP28) examined the textual incorporation (or omission) of global norms, normative themes, and principled ideas at each COP (Chapter 7). The Theory of *Cycles of Norm Change* (Sandholtz, 2017) was used as the core analytical framework, allowing the research to interpret how norms evolve through stages of emergence, argumentation, contestation, and (potentially) consolidation within the climate regime.

8.1 Summary of Findings

Here, I bring a summary of each chapter to show how each section spoke to each other and built on each other for the consistent analysis of the research question.

8.1.1 The Referenced Global Norms (Chapter 4)

Chapter 4 addressed the first sub-research question by mapping the global norms advocated by climate movements that found resonance within UNFCCC negotiations. Through analysis of interview data, the study highlighted how the eight global norms were referenced in the COP24–COP28 processes: anti-fossil fuel norms, climate justice, intergenerational equity, human rights, loss and damage, global earth stewardship, ecocide, and sufficiency (as a principled idea). These norms, advanced in global climate advocacy, were found to be invoked, contested, and/or reinforced within negotiation dialogues and outcomes. The chapter revealed

that negotiators increasingly invoke normative arguments—for example, moral imperatives or justice claims. An interview with a long-time UNFCCC official underscored this change, observing that issues like ethics, intergenerational duty, and rights are now “a norm almost”⁵²⁶ even if final decision texts often water down normative themes for consensus. A critical insight from Chapter 4 is that these global norms do not operate in isolation; they intersect and coalesce into clusters—creating overlapping normative frameworks. The analysis showed how certain norms reinforce each other, making contestation a space to bolster resilience—often through strategic intervention of norm entrepreneurs⁵²⁷ or champions.⁵²⁸ This finding demonstrates that climate movements leverage multiple normative frames in tandem to increase resilience against contestation. Indeed, the formation of norm clusters can create a united front of values and principles that mutually reinforce each other’s legitimacy and make it harder for antipreneurs to dismiss any single norm in the cluster.⁵²⁹ Chapter 4 findings show that a broad normative framework is evolving within the COP process, characterised by increasing normative content in discourse, creative and often purposeful reinterpretation by states, and an ongoing tension between normative ambition and political constraints (of national interests, geopolitical tensions, and trade interests). Nevertheless, the growing presence of climate movements is helping norms become referenced in negotiations.

8.1.2 The Influence of Global Norms (Chapter 5)

Having investigated how the eight norms are referenced and how norm diffusion during COP24-28 happened, Chapter 5 examined *how these referenced global norms*, is addressing the second sub-question. The analysis revealed that the referenced global norms have permeated COP negotiations mainly through the influence of climate movements and transnational advocacy networks (i.e., the norm entrepreneurs). They were observed to push normative framings into the formal negotiation space through various tactics and strategies, for instance, moral argumentation, narrative framing, public mobilisation, and lobbying. Interview evidence highlighted how advocacy groups, and youth activists in particular, deliberately frame issues in terms negotiators cannot ignore—for example, recasting emissions targets as a matter of intergenerational justice or human rights obligation. Initially, norms entered negotiations “at the margins”⁵³⁰—via side events, informal dialogues, or as language in draft texts—but over

⁵²⁶ Interview with IP09

⁵²⁷ See *Chapter 5: Influence of Global Norms on Negotiations and Agreements*

⁵²⁸ See *Chapter 6: Norm Champions and Norm Antipreneurs*

⁵²⁹ See *Chapter 6: Norm Champions and Norm Antipreneurs*

⁵³⁰ Interview with IP01, IP06, IP13, IP20

successive COPs they penetrated into core negotiating language as their legitimacy grew and more parties became receptive to their moral rationale. For instance, the two-side activism by Climate Youth Negotiator Program (by Youth Negotiators Academy) posited a plausible example. Inside-outside synergy illustrates that normative influence is not a linear diffusion, but rather an iterative push-and-pull between external advocacy and internal political will. Movements raise the moral stakes outside, while norm champions inside the COP negotiations echo and institutionalise these calls. The Theory on *Cycles of Norm Change* captured this process by focusing on the critical stage of argumentation. During argumentation, norm entrepreneurs (movements, civil society, NGOs) actively contest and reshape understandings of appropriate action by persuading others. The thesis' findings showed that COP negotiations are grounds of contestation where (networked) movements introduce moral and scientific justifications to reframe state interests. For example, the Loss and Damage norm was strengthened by arguments invoking intergenerational equity and moral responsibility, framing loss and damage funding as a debt owed by major emitters to vulnerable communities and future generations. By bundling together multiple norms in their rhetoric (e.g. *loss and damage + climate justice + human rights*), norm entrepreneurs created compelling narratives that began to sway negotiation outcomes, as seen in the eventual decision at COP27 to establish a Loss and Damage fund.

However, findings also indicate that the influence of global norms on negotiations is often unevenly contested i.e., contestation is not generic in negotiations. Not all norms advanced by movements achieved the same level of acceptance or resistance. Some, like intergenerational equity or climate justice, have seen growing traction in both discourse and text. Others, like human rights norms, encountered strong resistance—references to human rights were repeatedly watered down or bracketed in negotiation texts due to push back from certain states. Chapter 5 documented cases where normative influence was impeded by concerns over national sovereignty or economic interests. For example, while *youth inclusion* is widely championed (performatively), actual power-sharing with youth or civil society remained limited. As such, making intergenerational equity a norm that is acknowledged more in spirit than in substantive practice, as one interviewee noted with the phrase “lip service”⁵³¹ to youth participation. Similarly, anti-fossil fuel language, despite its surge in advocacy, met with diluted phrasing in final decisions reflecting the influence of norm antipreneurs who lobbied to constrain how far this norm could penetrate agreements. These observations reinforce that

⁵³¹ Interview with IP01

global norms do influence UNFCCC negotiations, but the degree of influence varies depending on the norm's alignment with powerful states' interests and the strength of countervailing forces. In sum, Chapter 5 demonstrated that normative shifts in climate negotiations are real but hard-fought. The negotiations remain marked by incremental normative gains (as seen in Chapter 7) with frequent trade-offs—highlighting that normative influence in a consensus-based forum is a balancing act of attrition and coalition-building, as much as one of moral persuasion.

8.1.3 The Trailblazers and Resistors (Chapter 6)

While Chapters 4 and 5 focused on *what* norms are present and *how* they influence outcomes, Chapter 6 addressed *who* drives or impedes these normative changes—i.e., the “trailblazers” or resistors (Nisbett and Spaiser, 2023, p. 3). It identified the norm champions—often states (or coalitions of states)⁵³²—advocating movement-linked norms in the climate negotiation space, as well as the norm antipreneurs working to block or dilute those norms. These actors serve as crucial intermediaries and multipliers of normative influence, by leveraging their diplomatic clout or moral authority to amplify norms. The thesis provided concrete examples: Small Island Developing States (SIDS) emerged as prominent champions of the anti-fossil fuel norm, using their existential vulnerability to frame fossil fuel phase-out as a justice and survival issue. SIDS like Vanuatu and Tuvalu, often in alliance with the High Ambition Coalition and European countries, consistently advocated for stronger language on coal and gas phase-out, and even proposed initiatives (e.g. a fossil fuel non-proliferation treaty) to operationalise this norm. Their moral framing, that continued fossil fuel expansion is an injustice to vulnerable nations, resonated strongly, gradually pulling more actors toward this position. Another example of norm champions includes countries and alliances pushing climate justice and human rights norms, such as certain Latin American countries championing human rights-based language, or Indigenous Peoples' caucuses and allied governments elevating indigenous rights and global earth stewardship norms. These champions tactically invoke scientific reports, legal principles, cultural heritage, and civil society support to strengthen their case. As “connectors”, norm champions often bridge different groups and forums, linking transnational advocacy networks with formal diplomacy (Nisbett and Spaiser, 2023, p. 9).

⁵³² See *Chapter 2 - Review on Theory* for a discussion of norm champions as multipliers, trailblazers, and connectors—state or non-state actors capable of amplifying normative frames. For analytical simplicity and depth, however, *Chapter 6* focuses exclusively on state actors as norm champions.

Conversely, the thesis identified norm antipreneurs—as those actors who resist emerging norms and strive to maintain the status quo. For instance, norm antipreneurs to anti-fossil fuel norms often are fossil fuel-dependent states or those with economies tightly linked to high emissions industries; including some petro-states and major oil exporters who routinely opposed or weakened references to fossil fuel phase-out, human rights, or other norms linked to these norms, in texts. Chapter 6 noted that norm antipreneurs are not limited to states alone; industry lobbies and certain influential individuals also play a role (for instance, industry-affiliated delegates pushing back against anti-fossil initiatives). These actors employ various tactics of resistance: blocking consensus, diluting language, reframing debates to focus on different norms (e.g. emphasising economic development or national sovereignty as counter-norms to climate justice), and building coalitions to sustain status quo. Another case is the reluctance of certain parties to include human rights in climate decisions, which an interviewee attributed to “coordinated effort”⁵³³ by those states to prevent institutionalisation of rights-based obligations in the UNFCCC.

Crucially, Chapter 6 revealed that the line between champion and antipreneur is not always clear; it is fluid, and it changes. Many state actors play dual roles, championing some norms while obstructing others. The United Arab Emirates, for example, was cited as a champion of loss and damage funding (hosting discussions and supporting the new fund) even as it was perceived as an antipreneur on human rights norms, given domestic and regional politics or limited (or “choreographed”⁵³⁴) civic and democratic expression during COP28 presidency. Also, states are observed to champion the same norms which they opposed earlier or vice versa (e.g., India in COP27). This complexity underscores that states’ motivations are multifaceted; they might support norms that align with certain national, economic interests or values, and resist others that threaten their core economic or political priorities. Such behaviour leads to normative conflicts within negotiations: debates where one set of norms (e.g. equity and development) is pitted against another set (e.g. human rights or stringent environmental limits), requiring delicate bargaining. The chapter mapped these conflicts and noted their implications for consensus-building—often, progress on one norm comes at the expense of shelving another, as parties trade concessions to reach an agreement.

In summary, the findings from Chapter 6 highlight that agency matters in normative change. Climate movements rely on allies in power to carry their norms forward, and indeed norm

⁵³³ Interview with IP14

⁵³⁴ Interview with IP20

champions have been instrumental in achieving normative breakthroughs. At the same time, entrenched interests represented by norm antipreneurs impose a drag on norm diffusion, often succeeding in slowing or diluting normative shifts. The COP negotiation can thus be seen as a contested normative space where progressive forces and conservative forces continuously interact. This personified struggle—between champions and antipreneurs—helps explain *why* some global norms advanced by climate movements rapidly gain international traction while others face resistance. It also reinforces the theoretical idea from Sandholtz (2017) that normative change is cyclical and conflictual: each norm proposition triggers responses (support or opposition) that shape its trajectory. The presence of antipreneurs ensures that even widely advocated norms must pass through stages of contestation and persuasion before they can become fully accepted or institutionalised.

8.1.3 The Normative Gains (Chapter 7)

Chapter 7 complemented the interview-based insights by examining how the COP cover decisions from 2018 to 2022 (COP24–COP28) reflect the normative discourses advanced by climate movements, thereby identifying tangible normative gains (or lack thereof) in the official outcomes. This document analysis provided a longitudinal view of patterns in norm integration across recent COPs. By comparing cover decision texts over five years, the study traced an uneven but discernible trajectory of normative embedding in the climate regime.

One key observation is the growing visibility of norms and normative content such as climate justice, just transition, indigenous rights, and fossil fuel references from COP24 to COP28. Chapter 7 finds that while normative discourse has broadened and ideas advanced by climate movements have entered international climate negotiations, their institutionalisation remains gradual and contested. Entrenched interests and consensus-rule constraints lead to outcomes that often reflect the lowest common denominator of agreement—hence recording both progress and paralysis simultaneously. The cover decisions effectively act as a *mirror*, capturing this push-and-pull: they document normative advancements (e.g., new principles acknowledged, new funds or mechanisms justified by moral arguments) and also the compromises or omissions (areas where normative language was dropped or softened due to lack of unanimous support). For example, while the establishment of the Loss and Damage Fund at COP27 can be seen as an institutionalisation of the loss and damage norm after decades of advocacy, the slow operationalisation and minimal initial funding reflect ongoing reluctance by some to fully endorse the climate justice logic behind it.

Also, the analysis of texts corroborated the role of climate movements and transnational advocacy networks as catalysts. Many of the normative shifts noted (like the inclusion of human rights language or fossil fuel references) followed high-profile campaigns, lawsuits, or public appeals outside the negotiations. Movements made negotiations “semi permeable”⁵³⁵—opening up space in what could have been purely technical documents for broader moral-political statements.

8.2 Contributions and Possible Future Research Directions

This thesis makes three key theoretical contributions to norms research, evidenced by empirical data and literature.

First, it has applied and extended Sandholtz’s (2017) Theory of *Cycles of Norm Change* to study the complex dynamics of norm emergence, contestation, and consolidation in the UNFCCC COP negotiations. The climate negotiation process proved to be a plausible case-study of the theory’s postulate that norm change is cyclical rather than linear. Through empirical evidence, the study illustrated how a global norm can move from emergence (articulation by norm entrepreneurs) to the argumentation stage, where it faces pushback and must be defended and/or reinterpreted, and then potentially towards broader acceptance and internalisation (or alternately, regression if antipreneurs’ resistance prevails; or into a new norm for further diffusion). The argumentation stage in particular was highlighted as the “engine room”⁵³⁶ of norm change in this context. The thesis demonstrated that at COPs, argumentation happens in multiple forums (formal negotiations, informal huddles, side-events, media narratives) and involves a wide array of actors, confirming the theory’s depiction of this stage as critical for persuasion and coalition-building. By tracing specific cases (e.g. the anti-fossil fuel norm through argumentation to partial adoption), the research validated the theory’s relevance to climate politics.

Second, the thesis showed the complex and nuanced interplay between norm entrepreneurs, norm champions, and norm antipreneurs in the climate negotiation context. While existing norm literature (see Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998; Puschkarsky, 2009; Heidrich and Nakonieczna-Bartosiewicz, 2021) often speaks of norm entrepreneurs (the initial advocates) and sometimes of norm antipreneurs (see Bloomfield, 2016; Campbell-Verduyn, 2017) this thesis underscores the importance of “norm champions” as a distinct analytical category.

⁵³⁵ Interview with IP20

⁵³⁶ See *Chapter 5: Influence of Global Norms on Negotiations and Agreements - Section 5.1.1 Argumentation*

Although literature touches on norm champions sparingly (see Green, 2018; Nisbett and Spaiser, 2023), a detailed analysis of the agency of norm champions remain lacking. The evidence of climate negotiations suggests that without norm champions, especially inside the negotiations—global norms advanced by climate movements would struggle to gain traction; thus, champions are an indispensable link in the norm diffusion. This finding refines norm Theory of *Cycles of Norm Change* by specifying roles and agency of actors in international norm change. The dynamic among these roles was theorised and evidenced in the thesis: champions often arise in response to entrepreneurs, and antipreneurs often intensify their efforts in response to champions. In doing so, the research highlights how norm evolution is a contested, multi-actor process—enriching theoretical understandings of power and agency in norm change.

Finally, the thesis exposes how a consensus-based, highly institutionalised environment affects norm diffusion and normative trajectories. One insight is that in the UNFCCC COP negotiations, norm contestation is not a failure of norm diffusion but an integral part of it. Norms that diffuse forward amidst contestation are not just resilient, but embody the process of translation (i.e., they are interpreted, adapted, and rearticulated within different local, national, or institutional contexts)—rightly understood as “chameleonic” and, therefore, “in motion” (Draude, 2017, p. 589). Translation of norms in the third wave of norms research is thus unique because of the innovation it brings through its dynamic motion.⁵³⁷ The thesis provides empirical grounding for how translation occurs in real time at COP negotiations (e.g. the term “just transition” being interpreted differently by different groups). The idea of norms as adaptable and capable of taking on different meanings in different alliances (rather than static injunctions) adds nuance to IR literature and norms research.

In summary, the thesis advances theoretical understanding by presenting a multidimensional view of norm change—one that incorporates multiple actors (entrepreneurs, champions, antipreneurs), multiple norms interacting, and multiple arenas of contestation—thereby offering a richer conceptual lens for future studies of normative influence in international politics.

While this thesis has advanced understanding of climate movements' normative influence on UNFCCC negotiations, several future research avenues remain. As climate movements evolve toward greater institutionalisation or radicalisation and global power alignments shift,

⁵³⁷ See *Chapter 2 – Review on Theory*

movement strategies and influence will correspondingly change and fragment, warranting continued observation and research. I suggest two potential avenues in particular. First, future ethnographic studies could provide reflexive accounts acknowledging researcher positionality and evolving contexts. Second, research examining how global norms gaining traction in UNFCCC negotiations which are advanced by transnational advocacy networks subsequently influence national law-making and domestic litigation patterns could show norm diffusion's downstream effects.

8.3 Final Reflections

Throughout the development of this thesis, I have collated perspectives drawn from various academic engagements in and around the institutional dynamics of UNFCCC Conference of the Parties (COP) negotiations. I am concerned that the focus on climate change activism in and around the UNFCCC is diminishing or becoming more fragmented, even though the need for political action remains more than important. This temporal disjuncture reflects broader shifts in global political configurations; the research trajectory, initiated during October 2022 amid heightened climate advocacy, now concludes in late 2025 against a backdrop of discernible institutional and discursive regression.

The geopolitical recalibrations following COP29 in Baku, Azerbaijan, were further amplified by subsequent electoral outcomes in the United States, culminating in President Trump's renewed withdrawal from the Paris Agreement and fossil-friendly policies (which are arguably reappearing across the globe). These developments unfold within increasingly complex security challenges characterised by the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war, India-Pakistan tensions, Israel-Palestine war and more. Such geopolitical dynamics inevitably constrain the political capital available for multilateral climate cooperation. COP30's designation of Belém, Brazil—strategically positioned within the Amazon—initially generated considerable anticipation for substantive progress. However, the convergence of logistical complexities, infrastructural limitations, and the growing disjuncture between elevated expectations and deliverable outcomes reflects deeper structural tensions within contemporary climate governance (Watts, 2025). Moreover, the observable shift toward realism (with power asymmetries exacerbated by self-interested states), coupled with fragmenting multilateral environmental diplomacy, positions climate politics at a critical inflection point, necessitating innovative scholarly engagement. Ideas need to flow. Climate movements need to go beyond norm permeation and incorporation, aiming at multi-level normative shift across all or as many diplomatic platforms

as possible, thus mainstreaming climate governance. Transnational advocacy networks need to *sustain* and ratchet up the moral force for climate action and ambition. As such, with my contribution in form of this thesis, I situate myself as a norm entrepreneur, aiming to create normative shifts through this research.

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Appendix – I: Codes for MAXQDA

Apart from the eight normative codes outlined in *Chapter 3: Methodology – Section 3.1 Research Design*, the following were used as codes for Interviews only.

Code	Definition
Influence from youth climate activists	Influence stemming from the actions, advocacy, and visibility of young individuals or youth groups focused on addressing climate change. This influence often manifests in increased public awareness in and around negotiations, pressuring negotiators, and the mobilisation of grassroots support for stronger climate action.
Influence from other climate movements	Impact derived from the collective efforts of various organised groups or movements dedicated to climate action, including environmental organisations, grassroots coalitions, and global campaigns. These movements often drive policy changes, shape public opinion, and contribute to the broader climate discourse. Further, their influence in climate negotiations in addition to their persuasive methods in public discourse is explored.
Influence from NGOs	The effect that non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have on international climate negotiations, climate policy and action through their research, advocacy, and on-the-ground projects. NGOs often serve as intermediaries between the public, policymakers, negotiators and other stakeholders, providing expertise and mobilising support for climate initiatives.
Influence from others (e.g. industry)	The impact exerted by various stakeholders, including industries, businesses, and financial institutions, on (UNFCCC) climate negotiations. This influence can be both positive, through investments in sustainable practices, and negative, through lobbying among others.
Norm Antipreneurs	Actors (individuals, entities, states, etc.) that actively resist or challenge emerging norms, in the context of this research particularly those related to climate action and sustainability. These actors may work to maintain the status quo or promote alternative norms that undermine climate initiatives.

Conflict between norm champions and norm antipreneurs	Disputes or disagreements between norm antipreneurs and those who uphold and promote existing norms (norm champions). This conflict often occurs in the context of climate policy, where progressive and conservative forces clash over the direction of climate action.
Changes in negotiations	Shifts in the dynamics, strategies, and outcomes of climate negotiations. These changes can be influenced by new data, shifting political landscapes, or evolving public, and stakeholder demands.
Counter-productive actions by climate movements	Actions taken by climate movements that unintentionally hinder progress towards climate goals. These can include tactics that alienate potential allies, strategic missteps, or actions that provoke backlash.
Enabling factors for normative change (not actors)	Conditions or elements that facilitate the adoption of new norms, such as public awareness, scientific evidence, technological advancements, and supportive policies. These factors create an environment conducive to normative shifts towards sustainability and climate action.
Dampening factors/barrier for normative change (not actors)	Obstacles or conditions that impede the adoption of new norms, including economic constraints, political opposition, cultural resistance, and misinformation. These barriers hinder efforts to promote sustainable practices and climate action.
Collaboration patterns (between climate movements and negotiators)	The ways in which climate movements and civil society organisations interact and cooperate with climate negotiators. This can include formal partnerships, advisory roles, and coordinated advocacy efforts to influence negotiation outcomes.
Collaboration patterns (between climate movements/civil society and UNFCCC)	The forms of engagement and cooperation between climate movements, civil society organisations, and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). These patterns can involve participation in UNFCCC processes, joint initiatives, and contributions to policy development.

Appendix – II: Interview Guide

I will start the recording now.

[If this is not known in advance, ask in which COP they participated and in what role]

1. My first question is quite general. What influence do various climate movements (like Youth Climate Activists such as Greta Thunberg, Vanessa Nakate etc., Indigenous People) and campaign groups have on the international climate negotiations?
2. Climate Movements often advance normative arguments for climate action. For instance, young climate activists such as Greta Thunberg demand intergenerational justice and remind us that we have a duty of care for our children. To what extent are such arguments referenced during negotiations?
3. How about normative arguments against fossil fuels, advanced by various climate movements and campaign groups such as the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty? To what extent do they resonate during the negotiations?
4. What other normative arguments that appeal to some form of morality or justice, have you witnessed at the negotiations? Do they have their origin in climate movements? (If they don't talk about it, follow-up question on Loss and Damage)

Has there been a change in the language of references?

[Follow-up questions to those, who have participated in several COPs: To what extent did you witness change in the types of normative arguments that were referenced during the various COP negotiations over time?]

5. Are there negotiation participants who actively advance normative arguments brought forward by climate movements? And if yes, who are they? (to identify norm champions)
6. And on the other hand, which negotiation participants reject those normative arguments, actively trying to prevent them having influence on the negotiations? (to identify norm antipreneurs)?
7. And as we are coming towards the end of the interview. Is there anything that you think we have not really mentioned yet, but you think is important within the context of what we have discussed? Is there anything that you would like to add?

Appendix – III: Ethics Approval

[This is the email received as ethics approval on 10/05/2023]

Dear Miss Susan Ann Samuel,

I am pleased to inform you that the above research ethics application has been reviewed by the Business, Earth & Environment, Social Sciences (AREA FREC) Committee and on behalf of the Chair, I can confirm a favourable ethical opinion based on the documentation received at date of this email.

Please retain this email as evidence of approval in your study file.

Please notify the committee if you intend to make any amendments to the original research as submitted and approved to date. This includes recruitment methodology; all changes must receive ethical approval prior to implementation. Please see <https://ris.leeds.ac.uk/research-ethics-and-integrity/applying-for-an-amendment/> or contact the Research Ethics Administrator for further information, if required.

Ethics approval does not infer you have the right of access to any member of staff or student or documents and the premises of the University of Leeds. Nor does it imply any right of access to the premises of any other organisation, including clinical areas. The committee takes no responsibility for you gaining access to staff, students and/or premises prior to, during or following your research activities.

Please note: You are expected to keep a record of all your approved documentation, as well as documents such as sample consent forms, risk assessments and other documents relating to the study. This should be kept in your study file, which should be readily available for audit purposes. You will be given a two-week notice period if your project is to be audited. It is our policy to remind everyone that it is your responsibility to comply with Health and Safety, Data Protection and any other legal and/or professional guidelines there may be.

I hope the study goes well.

Best wishes

Taylor Haworth, Research Ethics Administrator, Secretariat

On behalf of Dr Judith Hanks, AREA FREC, Chair