2026 Bonn Seminar

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INTRODUCTION

The ecbi Bonn Seminars have, since 2005, provided an informal, Chatham House rules forum for delegates from developing and European countries to exchange ideas on issues relevant to the negotiations under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), while building mutual understanding and trust. The Seminars are held annually on the sidelines of the UNFCCC Subsidiary Body meetings in June. The 2026 ecbi Bonn Seminar took place on 14 June at the University of Bonn alongside the 64th session of the UNFCCC Subsidiary Bodies (SB64).

Over 40 participants from developing and European countries discussed the Mitigation Work Programme (MWP) and the Just Transition Work Programme (JTWP), as well as expectations for COP31 in Antalya, Türkiye, in November, where the future of the two Work Programmes will be decided. Discussions also took place on reforming and streamlining the multilateral climate process to make it more responsive to the current phase of implementing the Paris Agreement, and on new innovative sources of funding for loss and damage.

Opening the Seminar, Kishan Kumarsingh, Head of ecbi's Fellowship and Trust-building Programme, stressed the consensus-based process for deciding the event agenda.
Welcoming participants, ecbi Director Benito Müller thanked Denmark for supporting the work of ecbi over the last five years.

MITIGATION WORK PROGRAMME

Maesela Kekana, Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment, South Africa, and co-facilitator of the Mitigation Work Programme (MWP), presented on the MWP and various work streams under the UNFCCC that address mitigation.

Kekana noted that while COP31 will decide whether to extend the MWP beyond 2026—and determine necessary improvements if it is extended—a critical question remains: can COP31 consolidate multiple ongoing mitigation discussions under the UNFCCC into a single, coherent package? He highlighted several distinct streams currently addressing mitigation:

- The Global Mutirão Decision, the flagship political agreement and overarching outcome of COP30 held in Belém, Brazil, includes the Global Implementation Accelerator (GIA) and the Belém Mission to 1.5, both of which aim to facilitate cooperation on mitigation, to limit global warming to 1.5°C.
- The Global Climate Action Agenda 2026–2030, a framework focusing on near-term climate actions.
- The annual High-Level Ministerial Dialogues on Pre-2030 Ambition.
- The Transition Away from Fossil Fuels (TAFF) and Forestry Roadmaps, two key thematic initiatives addressing sector-specific mitigation.
- The Second Global Stocktake (GST2), which will be launched at COP31 to comprehensively review progress on implementing the Paris Agreement.

Kekana said a central challenge for COP31 is determining whether these disparate mitigation elements can be woven into a cohesive package without causing duplication. This task is particularly challenging as these elements carry different mandates and distinct legal statuses. While Parties hold a wide range of expectations for each stream, he noted a common thread that could serve as a shared entry point: a focus on implementation.

Kekana said effective implementation of measures to mitigate greenhouse gases can build trust in the UNFCCC process and—backed by international cooperation and support for developing countries—provide a strong foundation for greater ambition in the future.

He elaborated on efforts under the MWP to shift discussions towards implementation and bridge the gap between negotiations and real-world action. He said a shift in this direction is particularly evident in the MWP's global dialogues, where Party and non-Party actors engage in matchmaking to implement mitigation measures. He observed that although this matchmaking component has not fully functioned as intended, it has at least succeeded in more actively engaging non-state actors in mitigation discussions. Referring to the MWP's investment-focused events, he questioned how to attract more technical experts into the discussions and how to package the key messages coming out of them more effectively.

On the High-level Ministerial Dialogue on Pre-2030 Ambition, Kekana said that although it could provide a valuable opportunity, ministers tend to deliver prepared statements instead of engaging in purposeful discussions. Highlighting an invitation by the COP30 President for input on the GIA, he explained that the Accelerator can be a "game changer" if all the pieces fall into place. The TAFF and Forestry roadmaps have also generated considerable momentum and discussions, he added, and represent another opportunity.

Referring to proposals to incorporate elements of the Global Climate Action Agenda into the formal negotiations at SB64, Kekana cautioned that the Action Agenda could become "poisonous to the negotiations" if it is not used to drive implementation. He felt it would serve a better purpose outside of the formal negotiations, by bringing together Parties, non-Party stakeholders, and financiers for peer learning to strengthen implementation. As an example, he described how South Africa used the Action Agenda to provide businesses with an opportunity to learn from sectors where decarbonisation is more advanced, for instance in the steel industry.

Moderator Kumarsingh said the presentation provided food for thought on advancing mitigation by coalescing around implementation as a central theme. He invited participants to reflect on the presentation and share additional ideas on how this could be achieved.

Opening the discussion, one developed country participant welcomed the examples of business collaboration to advance practical solutions. He agreed with Kekana's observations about the current relationship between the Action Agenda and the negotiations. However, he said that incorporating elements of the Action Agenda into the negotiations would ensure that negotiated outcomes become more closely aligned with the opportunities and solutions emerging from the Action Agenda and inject impetus and energy into the negotiations by reflecting solutions in negotiated outcomes. This, he argued, could encourage Parties to deploy such solutions and establish the policy frameworks needed to create demand for them.

Another developed country participant observed that both the formal negotiations and the Action Agenda are mutually reinforcing and equally necessary to accelerate implementation, because current ambition levels are insufficient. She stressed, however, that the two have distinct roles and responsibilities. Rather than polluting the formal process, she argued that the Action Agenda could provide the momentum needed to "bring courage to our politicians" by creating a space where partnerships are forged, coalitions are nurtured, and practical action is advanced.

A developing country participant noted that before the Paris Agreement the world was on a 4°C warming trajectory, whereas it is now on a 2.7–2.8°C trajectory, demonstrating significant progress. He stressed the role of the process in both providing guidance and supporting implementation, while expressing concern that the outcomes of the process remain "scattered".

Another developing country participant said the Belém Mission to 1.5 could provide a space to move mitigation beyond the formal negotiations and decision text into a more creative arena where opportunities to advance ambition could be explored. This could include identifying opportunities across different sectors, scaling up innovative solutions to enhance global ambition, and examining how such solutions could be applied nationally. She suggested that the GIA could complement this effort. However, she questioned how these different initiatives would "speak together," stressing the need to avoid duplication and to address this issue well before COP31.

Moderator Kumarsingh agreed that a dedicated space to advance implementation, distinct from the formal negotiations, is necessary. He added that such discussions could help shape expectations for COP31 and ensure implementation is meaningfully grounded in the Action Agenda.

A developing country participant said the COP Presidencies of Azerbaijan, Australia, Turkey, and Brazil should be encouraged to ensure the Belém Mission to 1.5, the GIA, and the Baku to Belém Roadmap to 1.3T complement and reinforce one other and avoid duplication. He highlighted investment-focused events as one of the MWP's greatest strengths. While noting that the GIA seeks to focus on solutions and connect partners to

further implementation, he observed that the investment-focused events are intended to serve the same purpose but have not been managed effectively. Developing countries that propose projects, he said, often leave these events discouraged because of the lack of interest from partner countries and organisations.

He proposed that future investment-focused events should be curated more carefully to showcase one or two success stories. Co-facilitators could identify projects to be announced at the COP, to demonstrate that successful implementation leads to emission reductions. He emphasised that his proposal was not intended to underestimate the complexity of matching projects with finance, but rather to ensure the process is not left to chance. More work behind the scenes is necessary to connect project proponents with financiers.

A developed country participant explained that cover decisions sometimes attempt to bring fragmented mitigation tracks together, but she questioned whether they actually help build a common understanding.

A developing country participant stressed the urgency of advancing both ambition and implementation but acknowledged that it was difficult for small delegations spread across the growing number of negotiating tracks, mandated events, agenda items, and initiatives outside the formal negotiations to continue to push for both. Nevertheless, she believed the real "energy" lies outside the formal process, where there is strong engagement not only from Parties but also from businesses, civil society and other non-Party stakeholders. In the Pacific, she stated, civil society helps fill significant capacity gaps, creating an integrated system in which actors outside the negotiations are already engaged in a positive and dynamic way.

A participant from a developed country commented on the mitigation package for COP31, trust among Parties, and the Belém Mission to 1.5. On the mitigation package for COP31, he said the current landscape should help shape expectations for what COP31 can deliver and how it can contribute to GST2. While duplication of processes should be avoided, overlap in substance is both inevitable and appropriate. Certain messages can be reflected across multiple initiatives, and the breadth of the Action Agenda should be fully harnessed. He stressed that the overall package must be comprehensive and include negotiated outcomes.

On trust among Parties and the process, he agreed with Kekana that implementation is fundamental to building trust. While rebuilding confidence in the UNFCCC process must begin with tangible results, this function of the process has weakened in recent years. Unless the process is put back on track, he warned, both Parties and the wider public will lose confidence in the system, with serious consequences for both the process and global climate action.

He described the Belém Mission to 1.5 as an innovative tool that could evolve over time, serving as a connector between different processes and a bridge between the Action Agenda and negotiated outcomes. He suggested it could become a permanent feature, carried forward and updated by successive COP Presidencies. Starting with the report expected at COP31, he proposed developing a mechanism that complements existing tools within the UNFCCC process.

Another developed country participant, reflecting on the interaction between the negotiations and climate action, said efforts are underway to determine which issues genuinely require negotiated outcomes and where alternative approaches may be more effective. He commended Brazil for restructuring the Action Agenda and introducing tools such as the GIA, arguing these should be built upon while ensuring continuity across future Presidencies.

On the MWP, he questioned how to ensure that the right participants—those with the expertise and authority to mobilise investment, develop projects, implement policies, and engage seriously with the financial community—attend the investment-focused events. He also noted that the MWP and other processes are generating substantial amounts of information and asked how data emerging from the transparency framework and other processes could be used more effectively.

A developed country participant, and co-facilitator of the MWP dialogues, said one consequence of fragmentation of the mitigation agenda is that discussions can quickly become focused on process rather than substance. As an example, she said Parties spent considerable time discussing whether issues such as forests, agriculture, and land use should be addressed under the MWP or elsewhere.

On the MWP's investment-focused events, she noted some funders, for instance philanthropists, can make funding decisions immediately, whereas other funders require board approval. Each organisation operates according to different funding cycles and rules. The World Bank's investment process, for example, is linked to the International Monetary Fund's decision-making timetable. As a result, expectations that investment-focused events would lead directly and immediately to project financing have proven unrealistic. She noted efforts to bring funders and project proponents together after the events to assess what has and has not worked, identify improvements, and clarify expectations.

She also described efforts to convene panels representing diverse funders, including equity investors, bilateral donors, and international financial institutions. While some success stories have emerged each year, she noted many funders participate virtually, limiting opportunities for informal engagement. There were some ongoing discussions, but it was too early to determine whether they would ultimately result in financing. She called for realistic expectations for the investment-focused events and encouraged

participants to suggest strong resource people as planning begins for the next MWP cycle. Continuing the process, she argued, is essential to building expert networks and a community of practice.

Closing the discussion, Kumarsingh said the MWP has generated valuable material to build on, and the next challenge will be to consolidate these ideas as work moves forward.

JUST TRANSITION WORK PROGRAMME

Joseph Teo, Chief Negotiator for Climate Change at Singapore's Ministry of Sustainability and the Environment and Co-Chair of the JTWP contact group, outlined expectations for COP31 regarding the JTWP and how related work is being advanced. He began by congratulating Brazil on the landmark COP30 decision to establish a just transition mechanism, noting strong support from Parties and non-Party stakeholders. He traced the evolution of just transition discussions, referencing high-level ministerial meetings and multiple formal dialogues held to date.

He explained that feedback from civil society has emphasised inclusivity and social participation; stakeholders are already calling on countries to embed these principles in national transition plans. Synthesising these inputs has been complex and time-consuming, adding to negotiation challenges.

He said key themes emerging from JTWP dialogues include the role of education systems, meaningful public participation, Indigenous Peoples' rights, multi-stakeholder

engagement, and people-centred bottom-up approaches. The next phase of dialogue will focus on identifying additional priority messages.

Teo noted that Terms of Reference (ToR) for reviewing the JTWP must be agreed before the close of SB64 and a draft is already in circulation. Like the MWP, COP31 will decide whether to extend the JTWP and, if so, in what form. He also congratulated Colombia on the Santa Marta meeting on transitioning from fossil fuels, which initiated a workstream on national and regional just transition roadmaps.

For the new just transition mechanism, he said core functions will include international cooperation, technical support, capacity building, knowledge sharing, and enabling equitable, inclusive transitions. Finance is not yet specified and will be addressed at COP31; SB64 aims to draft a decision on how the mechanism will operate. Outstanding matters include: clarifying how the mechanism relates to the JTWP; agreeing its ToR, scope, purpose, functions, governance, and timelines; and confirming whether its mandate goes beyond existing JTWP elements. While no Party has opposed continuing the JTWP, discussions will focus on strengthening it and avoiding duplication with the mechanism.

He explained that proposals under consideration include a matchmaking role for the mechanism, support for developing countries to design nationally appropriate just transition pathways, integration of social considerations into national planning, and examining whether trade-related climate measures act as barriers to progress.

In closing, Moderator Kumarsingh observed that defining the mechanism's relationship to the JTWP—and whether one replaces or complements the other—will be critical, particularly given a tendency to retain outdated processes. He invited participants to share views, including on the potential use of tools such as AI to support work like drafting the ToR.

A developing country participant noted that constituencies and civil society had made establishing a just transition mechanism their top priority for COP31, warning they would view the COP as a failure without it. The COP31 Presidency is therefore prioritising the issue and ensuring meaningful space for discussion. She commended the Co-Chairs for building consensus and developing a clear work plan, noting they represented a model of leadership needed for future proposals.

She said COP31 will aim to operationalise the mechanism, though challenges remain as just transition is directly tied to economic development pathways, social protection, human rights, and vulnerable groups. Diverse interests add complexity, but a successful outcome is seen as achievable, she believed. On the mechanism's relationship with the JTWP, she acknowledged resistance to ending the Work Programme, but said duplication

must be avoided. While discontinuing the established JTWP would be difficult, she felt its functions could potentially be absorbed by the mechanism over time.

Another developing country participant recalled that the JTWP began with a focus on social protection and the impacts of climate action on workforce employment and labour. It has since expanded to cover nearly all economic sectors and poverty reduction. He questioned whether the mechanism should be a new UNFCCC constituent body or a coordination platform, noting conceptual clarity is essential to advance action.

A third developing country participant agreed the Brazilian Presidency had performed strongly. He said the issue was initially handled by mitigation teams in their negotiating group, but the issue's growing scope led to a dedicated team. He echoed calls for clarity on definition, and highlighted the proposed functions of international cooperation, knowledge sharing, and matchmaking, aligning with discussions on the MWP.

A developed country participant picked up on the role of AI, suggesting it could streamline decisions and terminology to reduce redundancy. He also noted that AI itself risks driving an unjust digital transition, with impacts on employment. For UNFCCC purposes, he stressed that low-emission pathways must explicitly address socioeconomic effects, workers' circumstances and national contexts, and that the mechanism's functions need clear definition, followed by practical arrangements to deliver them.

A developed country participant stated just transition spans all sectors of society and must avoid widening inequalities. Approaches will vary across national contexts, and there is no single "pathway". She said the JTWP's inclusive engagement with experts and stakeholders should be maintained. While the issue can benefit from the convening role of the UNFCCC, she said the UNFCCC must not take on roles outside its mandate, such as setting labour or human rights standards covered by other international agreements.

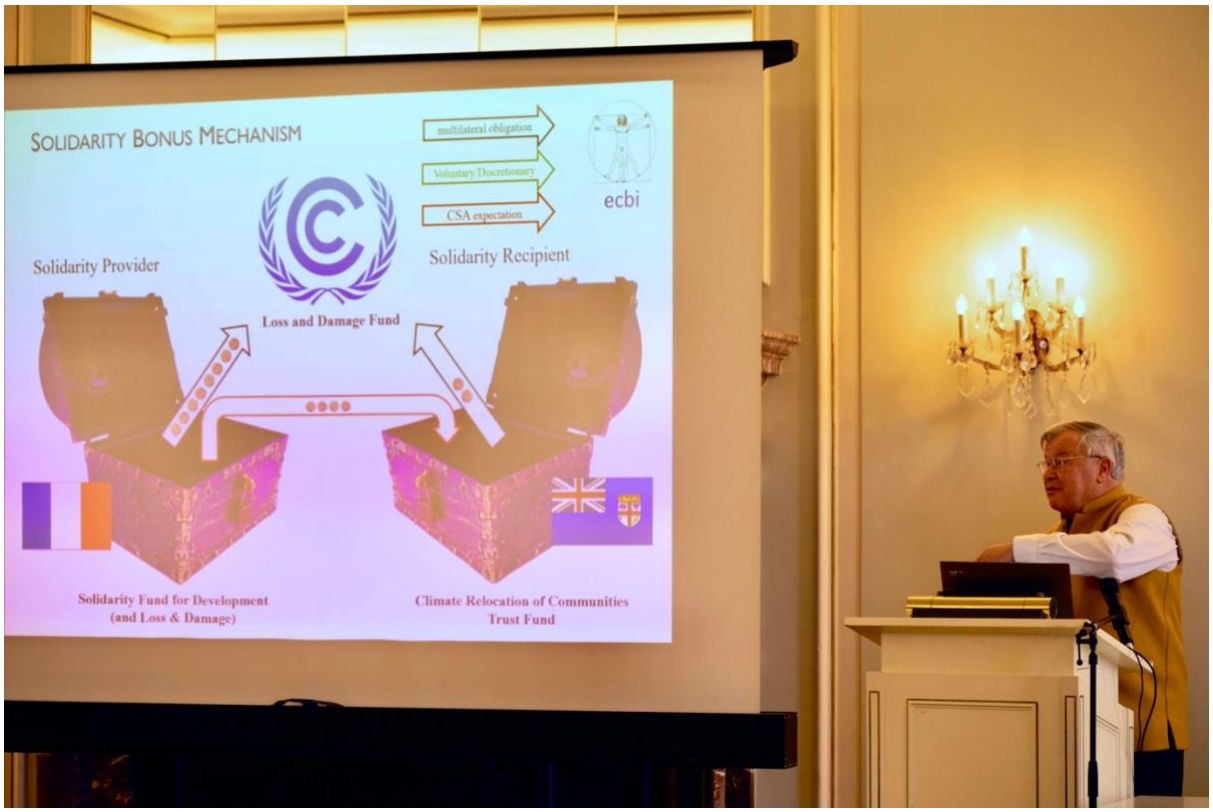
She also warned against creating new bodies, especially in the current climate of limited funding: existing constituted bodies, including the Adaptation Committee, already lack adequate mandates and funding, with a major donor having withdrawn support. Instead, she said, existing structures should be used more effectively, with just transition integrated across workstreams.

A developing country participant agreed that COP 31 should define the mechanism's functions, distinguish them from the JTWP, and establish effective structures at national and global levels. She believed there was broad consensus that the mechanism will not replace the JTWP.

Finally, a developing country participant linked the mechanism to the Santa Marta process, noting both aim to raise ambition. Her country emphasized the role of the JTWP and mechanism in providing guidance on what a just transition entails in the context of

implementing NDCs, long-term strategies, and NAPs. She proposed that the JTWP could act as an overarching framework, with the mechanism acting as an implementation arm. She also highlighted inclusive multi-stakeholder design, alongside alignment with the GST and work to phase out fossil fuels.

CLIMATE SOLIDARITY LEVIES AND ALLIANCE



Müller presented a proposal to implement Climate Solidarity Levies and establish an Alliance to raise funding for loss and damage.

As a precedent for his proposal, he described the international solidarity levy—most notably applied to airline tickets—to create stable, dedicated funding for combating HIV/AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis. This levy was jointly championed by Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and French President Jacques Chirac in 2005 and resulted in the launch of UNITAID in 2006. Small, progressive surcharges on air travel, typically just a few euros/dollars per ticket, were adopted by several nations, raising over US$ 3 billion in its first 15 years to support millions of people worldwide. It was designed as an innovative, predictable stream of global health finance separate from standard aid budgets.

Müller noted that the Least Developed Countries had introduced a similar proposal to the UNFCCC for an International Air Passenger Levy in 2008, to support adaptation. While that proposal was not accepted, he said funding for loss and damage is now urgently

needed, at a time when international sources of funding are shrinking, and dealing with the impacts of climate change that have already occurred is not optional for affected countries.

He described Fiji's Climate Relocation of Communities Trust Fund, established in 2019, explaining that it receives domestic and international funding to support planned relocation in response to sea level rise and other climate-related loss and damage. Fiji raises domestic revenue for the fund by taxing nightclubs and other luxury activities because like other affected countries, they cannot wait for international support.

He proposed a Solidarity Alliance, where affected countries would establish a Trust Fund similar to Fiji's, to receive domestic and international revenue—including from philanthropic organisations and the private sector. International support could be channelled to the Trust Funds through a Solidarity Bonus Mechanism. Under this model, if Fiji voluntarily contributed US$ 2 million to the Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage (FRLD), for example, France could reimburse that amount directly into Fiji's domestic trust fund rather than through the FRLD. This would create an incentive for Fiji to mobilise more domestic resources. He stressed that the mechanism could operate not only within the Alliance but also alongside existing multilateral funds.

Müller explained that he had presented the idea of a Solidarity Bonus Mechanism to the Brazilian Ambassador in London, who expressed interest and suggested adapting the concept to a regional context. This led to the idea of regional collaborative alliances. He suggested one such alliance could be established in Latin America and the Caribbean, citing the Barbados Resilience and Regeneration Fund as an example. As with Fiji, Barbados could voluntarily contribute to the FRLD, after which Brazil could provide a matching contribution directly to Barbados's domestic fund. He suggested the CARICOM Secretariat could administer such a mechanism.

Müller also said he discussed the proposal at a side event during COP28 in Dubai, where participants suggested exploring the concept with the United States. While acknowledging a federal levy in the United States to support loss and damage in developing countries would be politically unrealistic, he said sub-national authorities could provide an alternative. Referring to an ecbi Discussion Note exploring whether US port authorities in New York, New Jersey, and Los Angeles could adopt Climate Solidarity Levies, he explained that a US$ 5 levy per ticket could generate around US$ 600 million annually.

Müller suggested the Pacific Island Forum Secretariat could manage a regional trust fund for the Pacific, which could receive contributions from countries like Australia. Potential supranational recipients could include the Pacific Resilience Facility and other regional funds, with or without the involvement of multilateral funds. He also highlighted Kenya's

County Climate Change Funds, Ethiopia's Climate Resilient Green Economy Facility, and the potential for a European-African collaboration.

Müller urged countries to take the next step, in particular Kenya and France, as Co-Chairs of the Global Solidarity Levies Task Force. He also highlighted ecbi's submission on the Climate Solidarity Alliance and Levies to the Baku to Belém Roadmap to 1.3T.

During the ensuing discussion, one developing country participant supported the concept as a potential "multiplier or accelerator fund". He noted that implementing his country's NDC would cost around US$150 billion and that waiting for external finance was not a viable option. He therefore welcomed innovative financing approaches and cited his country's disaster recovery fund, which receives a 5% service fee on every banking transaction. He said he would share Müller's proposal with his government, which was seeking ways to mobilise domestic resources for both loss and damage and NDC implementation.

Another developing country participant thanked Müller for continuing to propose innovative approaches to climate finance. She noted that measures of this kind are included among the recommendations in the first part of the Baku to Belém Roadmap to 1.3T. She also highlighted one of the roadmap's pilot options for new levies to address urgent climate and related development needs in developing countries, particularly the most vulnerable, including by strengthening international cooperation on taxation.

QUO VADIS COP?

Müller's next presentation drew on the 2021 ecbi paper *Quo Vadis COP?* and its 2024 update on future arrangements for intergovernmental meetings under the UNFCCC. He said the paper analyses how participation by Parties and non-Party stakeholders has grown in the past decades. It reveals that attendance roughly doubles after each major treaty COP, establishing a "new normal", with the number of participants only growing thereafter. This has resulted in "mega-COPs".

This pattern of ever-expanding mega-COPs is concerning for three main reasons, Müller said. First, from an equity perspective, the logistical and financial demands of hosting such large events mean that many countries are effectively unable to host or preside over COPs. Second, the sheer scale of the venues undermines opportunities for informal networking, making chance encounters and spontaneous exchanges increasingly difficult. Third, mega-COPs create reputational risks for the multilateral climate process by raising public expectations about what can realistically be achieved while reinforcing perceptions that the meetings have become overblown jamborees with large carbon footprints.

Müller described mega-COPs as comprising three distinct components: the negotiations, high-level summits, and expos. The *Quo Vadis COP?* paper proposes separating the negotiations from the other two components. He argued that this would reduce attendance at the negotiations to around 5,000 participants, enabling many more countries to host them.

He suggested that one of the main drivers of ever-growing participation is a "fear of missing out" (FOMO). If Heads of State attend the COP, he explained, ministers feel obliged to attend, followed by officials from their ministries, creating a cascading effect that steadily increases participation. Referring to reports that the Leaders' Summit at COP31 in Antalya could take place during the first week of the conference, he said this was likely to drive up participation numbers.

REFORMING THE UNFCCC SESSIONS

Paul Watkinson, former Chief Climate Negotiator, France, and Stefan Ruchti-Crowley, former Head of Environment, Energy and Health at the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, introduced the next session by presenting their co-authored paper, *Quo Vadis COP? Reforming the UNFCCC Sessions to Improve Negotiations and Support Implementation*.

Watkinson said the paper examines how the UNFCCC sessions—traditionally regarded as "the negotiations"—could be made more effective in supporting implementation. He highlighted overcrowded agendas, the tendency to attempt too much during each session, the resulting difficulty of delivering meaningful outcomes, and the limited time left to focus on implementation. Referring to a recent study showing that around three-quarters of COP decisions are now procedural, he suggested the figure could be closer to 90%. This,

he argued, raises the question of what genuinely requires negotiation and whether other COP outcomes should be valued more highly.

Highlighting the need for the UNFCCC process to increasingly focus on supporting implementation in the post-Paris Agreement era, Watkinson said a key challenge is ensuring the right people are in the room to discuss and share national implementation experiences and challenges. He lamented that existing mechanisms for fostering cooperation on implementation are not being used effectively and asked how the growing number of events, dialogues, and discussions could be better linked to promote problem-solving, peer learning, and practical action.

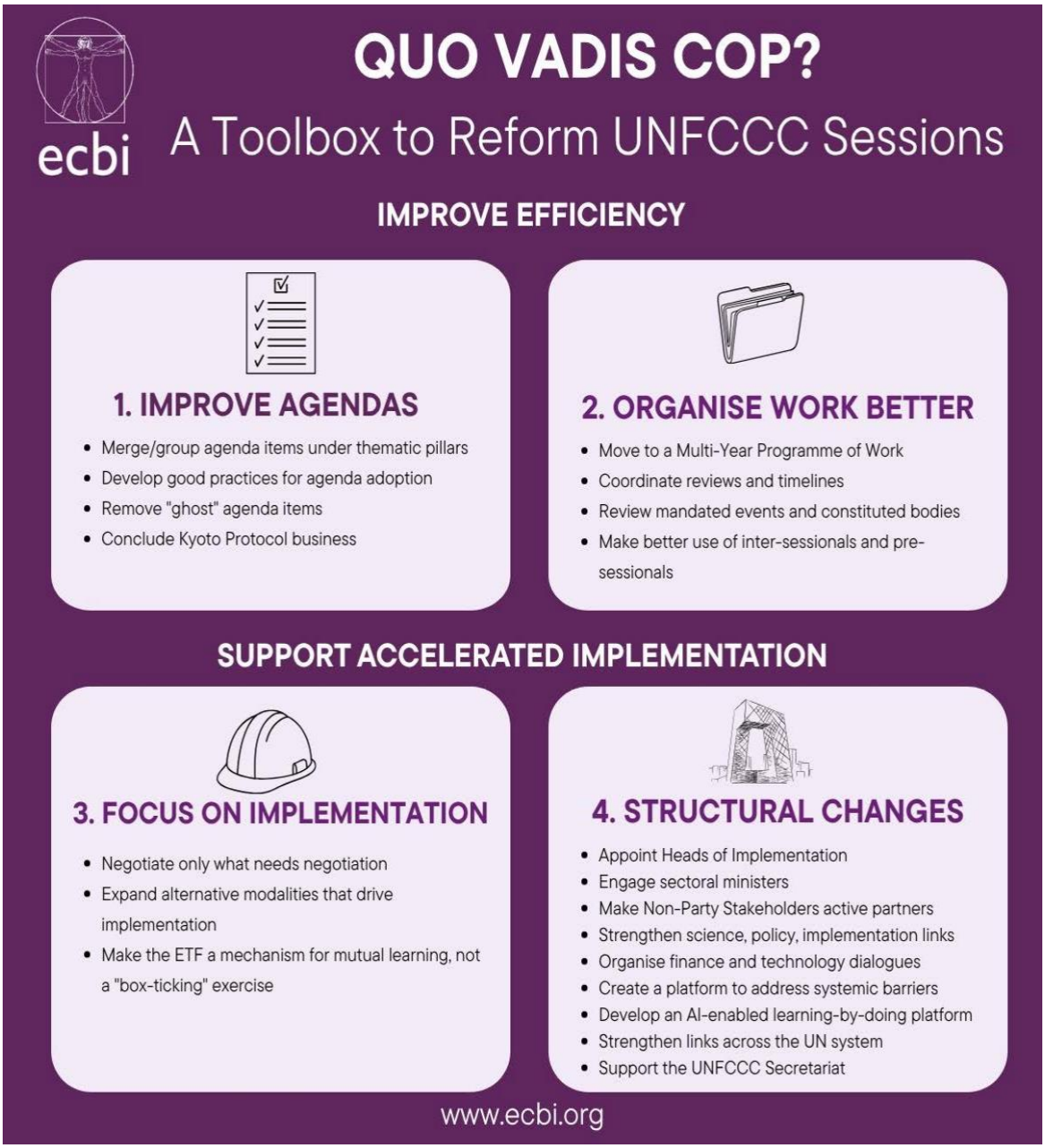
Ruchti-Crowley then outlined the reform "toolbox" proposed in the paper. He stressed that all the proposals are fully consistent with the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement and do not require changes to those institutions.

The first component of the toolbox focuses on improving agendas by:

- merging or grouping agenda items under broad thematic pillars, such as mitigation, adaptation, finance, and transparency, to improve coherence;
- developing good practices to reduce procedural disputes over agenda adoption and avoid fragmentation and duplication;
- removing legacy or "ghost" agenda items; and
- concluding outstanding Kyoto Protocol business.

The second component focuses on improving efficiency and the organisation of work. It proposes moving towards thematic multi-year programmes of work rather than revisiting every issue annually. Suggested measures include:

- aligning reviews and timelines that have evolved incrementally over time;
- conducting a system-wide review of mandated events, constituted bodies, and work programmes to improve coherence, efficiency, and effectiveness; and
- making greater use of intersessional and pre-sessional meetings for substantive work.



The third component addresses implementation by proposing:

- limiting negotiations to issues that genuinely require negotiated outcomes, recognising that implementation-focused work can often simply be noted;
- expanding innovative modalities that promote cooperation, mutual learning, and problem-solving, including facilitative dialogue formats such as the Talanoa Dialogue, roundtables, and World Café discussions; and
- ensuring the Enhanced Transparency Framework (ETF) becomes a mechanism for mutual learning rather than simply a compliance exercise.

The final component focuses on structural reforms, including:

- broadening delegations to include “Heads of Implementation”;

- engaging ministers responsible for energy, finance, trade, housing, and other relevant sectors;
- strengthening the integration of non-Party stakeholders;
- developing an AI-enabled learning platform to translate information into actionable insights;
- improving coordination across the UN system; and
- strengthening the capacity of the UNFCCC Secretariat to manage expanding mandates and better support implementation.

Concluding the presentation, Watkinson emphasised that these proposals could all be implemented within the existing institutional framework. They do not require new rules of procedure or changes to the consensus-based system. Rather, he argued, the process itself could be improved through leadership from current and future COP Presidencies, the Subsidiary Body Chairs, and the Secretariat. Stressing the UNFCCC process remains indispensable, he said the challenge is to ensure it can continue to deliver.

During the ensuing discussion, many participants welcomed the paper and its recommendations. Several observed that the first two components of the toolbox focus primarily on improving negotiations, whereas the third and fourth are more concerned with strengthening implementation.

Müller explained that the aim was to keep negotiating whatever needed to be negotiated, but also to create space and allow time at the sessions where practitioners and governments come together to discuss implementation and to learn from each other. He stressed the importance of people meeting and exchanging ideas with each other without needing a negotiated outcome.

One developed country participant noted many ongoing conversations around UNFCCC reform. He linked the issue to the earlier presentation on the MWP, noting that the Brazilian COP Presidency's initiatives—including the Belém Mission to 1.5, the GIA, and the strengthened Action Agenda—demonstrated how implementation could be elevated within the UNFCCC process.

While agreeing that reform is needed, he questioned how it could realistically be achieved. Recalling that his country had hosted a seminar on reform during its EU Presidency, he noted that despite many constructive presentations, the discussion stalled when participants were reminded that any reform would ultimately require consensus. He also highlighted his country's decision to bring a business delegation to the SB session for the first time, saying it had stimulated valuable discussions with project implementers and underscored the importance of considering both the focus of discussions and who should participate.

Watkinson acknowledged institutional change is difficult. He recalled his own time as Chair of the Subsidiary Body or Scientific and Technological Advice, when he was advised to "keep doing things the same way" because introducing changes could quickly become contentious. Nevertheless, he believed the process has now reached a point where leadership could drive meaningful reform. He cited the Belém process as an example of how a COP Presidency can organise discussions in innovative ways that go beyond the formal agenda. He reiterated that many of the proposals on structural reform and implementation do not require formal decisions, and that the Secretariat already has some flexibility in preparing draft agendas and has previously grouped related agenda items, citing response measures as an example. Recognising that Parties can be highly defensive, he stressed that reforms should be presented not as removing issues but as creating more space to address those that genuinely require attention. Waiting for agreement within the Arrangements for Intergovernmental Meetings (AIM) process, he warned, would mean reform never happens.

Agreeing that momentum for reform is growing and the pressure created by overcrowded agendas and mandated events has become overwhelming, one developed country participant said this presented an opportunity for both the COP Presidencies and the Secretariat to exercise leadership. She acknowledged many of the proposals in the first two elements of the toolbox have been raised previously, but progress has been blocked by the need for consensus.

Reflecting on the shift from negotiations to implementation, she suggested stepping back to reconsider the respective roles of the COPs and the negotiations. Although the UNFCCC is no longer negotiating treaties, negotiations still play an important role in sending political signals. They cannot be replaced, but they can be complemented by implementation related initiatives. Their principal role, she argued, is to identify gaps and determine what is needed to achieve the goals of the Paris Agreement. She also noted that between 17 and 19 finance-related items now appear on the agendas and observed that some Secretariat reports only need to be noted rather than negotiated.

A developing country participant argued that the COP's norm-setting role remains essential, given the many unresolved and emerging issues still before Parties. He explained that many of the proposals in the paper are already being discussed within the AIM process, where they are being "fiercely debated," particularly proposals to sunset or cluster mandates. Any discussion of reform, he argued, must be situated within the broader context of the negotiations. He suggested the UNFCCC could learn from other UN processes, such as the Human Rights Council, which faces similar budgetary and efficiency challenges. Building trust among Parties, he stressed, is essential to enable frank discussions on improving the efficiency of the process.

A developed country participant said the current circumstances were conducive to reform, noting the UNFCCC process is likely to be influenced by broader UN reform efforts. She observed that all the candidates for the next UN Secretary-General have underscored the need for reform and are expected to pursue it after taking office. She also anticipated that the budget for the next biennium would be reduced, requiring some processes to be scaled back and some agenda items to be discontinued.

While stressing the need for strong leadership, she argued that the COP Presidency was not best placed to lead reform because of its short tenure and competing priorities. Instead, she suggested the UNFCCC Executive Secretary should drive the process and expend the necessary political capital to build consensus among Parties. With the next budget due to be published in April, she believed this presented a timely opportunity to engage.

Another developed country participant observed that the growing number of papers on reform demonstrated the increasing demand for change. Although he did not agree with every recommendation in the paper, he noted broad agreement on the need to move forward. He also believed the Executive Secretary should lead the process, given his institutional responsibility and accountability, and present concrete proposals for Parties to consider. He warned that the process could "implode" if it remained too heavily Party-driven. He also questioned how far supplementary funding could fill resource gaps, particularly following the withdrawal of US funding. As an example of duplication in the process, he noted repeated calls during the Bonn trade dialogue for a trade and climate

committee, despite the existence of the World Trade Organization's Committee on Trade and Environment.

One developed country participant hoped the paper would help advance progress on reform and implementation of some of the ideas in it. While acknowledging some Parties actively seek to obstruct the process, he observed that, despite its shortcomings, the UNFCCC process continues to function. He suggested the time may be right for a systematic assessment of the vulnerabilities of the process, including those related to financing.

A developing country participant welcomed the many practical and achievable proposals in the paper but reflected on the obstacles to reform. She noted no recent COP Presidency had made reform a priority because of its political difficulty, while some Parties remained unwilling even to discuss the issue. She said her own attempts to persuade a Presidency to take up reform had met strong resistance. In her view, the AIM process was unlikely to produce meaningful progress while several countries continue to block discussions, often sending junior delegates to ensure the issue does not advance. Political leadership, she argued, offered the most promising path forward, and Heads of Delegation should be more directly engaged.

She illustrated the challenge by describing her own unsuccessful attempt to remove a long-standing "ghost" agenda item in the run up to COP30. Although the Party that had originally proposed the item acknowledged it had produced no substantive outcome over many years, it still refused to withdraw it, even after discussions involving the Secretariat and the Presidency. She called for bolder decisions to remove agenda items that have failed to evolve over successive COPs.

At the same time, she did not believe the system was facing an immediate financial crisis. Funding was available for the next two years, including for mandated events and Climate Weeks. However, she acknowledged that the loss of US funding would pose significant challenges for the 2028–2029 biennium.

Another developing country participant commented that the process has continued to expand, placing increasing pressure on smaller delegations that must cover a growing number of agenda items with limited personnel and resources. He also sensed institutional constraints within the Secretariat, observing that once structures are established, they are difficult to change. Stressing the importance of trust, both in leadership and in decisions to remove agenda items, he suggested reform would be more effective if pursued jointly by the COP Presidency and the Executive Secretary, drawing on models such as the Troika of past, current, and incoming Presidencies.

Another developing country participant similarly emphasised the need for continuity across Presidencies, arguing that sustained reform requires consistent leadership over

time. While acknowledging that the Secretariat has engaged on the issue, she observed that neither individual Parties nor negotiating groups have been willing to invest the political capital needed to drive change during either the SB sessions or the COPs.

A developed country participant, drawing on his previous experience in peacebuilding negotiations, asked how the UNFCCC could evolve into a "world-class facilitation organisation," bringing together experts, scientists, policymakers, and political leaders to solve problems collaboratively. He recommended undertaking more substantive work before COPs so that only a limited number of political issues require decisions during the COP itself. He also suggested complementing multilateral negotiations with "minilateral" approaches, creating regional or issue-specific spaces for decision-making. He saw the potential for an alliance focused on both learning and implementation, encouraging shared responsibility for convergence. Finally, he emphasised the need to institutionalise best practices rather than continually reinventing them.

Another developed country made six observations:

- While there is broad agreement that the process has become unmanageable, there is much less agreement on what should be done to improve it. The AIM process is unlikely to resolve the problem with fragmented and ballooning agendas, because consensus will never be reached on removing agenda items. However, similar items could be clustered and negotiating time reduced for issues that do not warrant additional time.
- The Executive Secretary should lead reform efforts by presenting concrete proposals and driving the agenda forward.
- No COP Presidency is likely to prioritise agenda management or institutional efficiency.
- The 2028-2029 budget negotiations will be a critical test of the process, as shrinking resources will require difficult choices.
- Agreement among successive COP Presidencies could provide the best opportunity to make the UNFCCC process fit for purpose, particularly while there are relatively few major negotiating issues on the agenda.
- The Bureau should work closely with the Executive Secretary by discussing reform proposals before they are presented more broadly, as securing support from a smaller group is easier than from nearly 200 Parties in plenary.

One developing country participant noted parallel discussions outside the UNFCCC on improving institutional efficiency, citing proposals to strengthen collaboration across UN agencies and a resolution adopted by the UN Environment Assembly on enhancing synergies among the multilateral environmental agreements.

Another speaker echoed earlier comments on the Executive Secretary's role. Observing that reform is a challenge across the multilateral system, he said the UN Secretary-

General had appointed a special envoy to lead broader UN reform efforts. Combined with geopolitical tensions, the withdrawal of US funding, and wider financial pressures, he warned that the UNFCCC process and Secretariat could face serious difficulties without reform.

Agreeing that the current moment presents an opportunity for reform, he emphasised the Bureau's important role. He suggested Parties develop a proposal for the Bureau to consider, enabling it to provide a mandate to the UNFCCC Executive Secretary and Secretariat. He also proposed appointing a Bureau member to work closely with the Executive Secretary and help bridge the divide between the Party-driven nature of the process and the Secretariat's institutional role. Given the limited appetite of COP Presidencies to champion reform, he argued that the ecbi papers and the participants in the seminar should serve as leverage to advance the issue. He concluded by urging Parties to establish a clear timetable for reform, recognising that a more effective UNFCCC process is in everyone's interest.

CLIMATE WEEKS

Ovais Sarmad, former UNFCCC Deputy Executive Secretary, presented on the evolution of Climate Weeks, describing them as part of a broader effort to support the international climate change agenda while fostering more democratic and regionally grounded climate action.

He explained that the UNFCCC Secretariat introduced the concept in 2010, initially organising four or five Climate Weeks across different regions. Their primary purpose was to bring together regional and national stakeholders to advance climate action, with only limited links to the formal negotiations. One objective was to shift some mandated UNFCCC events from the COPs to the Climate Weeks to reduce pressure on the annual conferences. Although this did not materialise, Climate Weeks have since been reimagined and reformatted.

Currently, two Climate Weeks are held each year—one in the region hosting the upcoming COP and another in a different region. The intention has been to integrate initiatives such as the Climate Action Agenda into these events. Beyond the UNFCCC process, Climate Weeks have now proliferated globally, beginning with New York Climate Week and followed by London Climate Week and many others. Sarmad noted that in India alone, he had attended about half a dozen Climate Weeks in the previous six months. While he welcomed their growth, he observed that Climate Weeks are not yet delivering the outcomes originally envisioned.

Sarmad recommended separating the Leaders' Summit from the COPs and relocating the broader "climate jamboree" to regional Climate Weeks. This change will not require

major institutional change and could be implemented if Parties agreed. He distinguished this proposal from ongoing discussions on streamlining COP agendas, mandates, and the work of the constituted bodies. He agreed that the latter were necessary and said they would require a small group of Parties to develop a clear and practical proposal for submission to the Bureau and, through it, to the Secretariat, together with a defined timeframe for implementation. He noted that Türkiye had identified this overall reform as one of its ten priority areas for COP31.

Sarmad highlighted opportunities for greater synergies among the three Rio Conventions, pointing to duplication across the Secretariats and the significant costs incurred by both the Secretariats and Parties, particularly in years when all three conventions hold COPs, as is the case in 2026. He noted that hosting a COP currently costs between US$200-300 million and questioned whether the Rio Conventions need to operate entirely separately or whether some functions could converge over time to improve efficiency.

Sarmad reiterated that the formal negotiations could continue to take place in Bonn while remaining under the presidency of the designated host country, citing the example of the Fijian Presidency during COP23, which was held in Bonn. He argued that consensus-based negotiations should be confined to the formal negotiating space, while the broader climate action agenda could be advanced through Climate Weeks held around the world.

Reflecting on his work since leaving the Secretariat, Sarmad said he had gained greater freedom to engage with diverse constituencies and speak openly about opportunities for reform. He stressed that both the UNFCCC process and the wider UN multilateral system are under considerable strain in terms of credibility and integrity, making this an opportune moment to pursue meaningful changes.

Concluding the Seminar, Kumarsingh encouraged participants to continue discussing these issues both in person and online and then closed the 2026 Bonn Seminar.