



The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Secretariat as an orchestrator in global climate policymaking

International Review of Administrative Sciences

2021, Vol. 87(1) 21–38

© The Author(s) 2019

Article reuse guidelines:

sagepub.com/journals-permissions

DOI: [10.1177/0020852319840425](https://doi.org/10.1177/0020852319840425)

journals.sagepub.com/home/ras



Thomas Hickmann 

University of Potsdam, Germany

Oscar Widerberg

Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Markus Lederer

Technical University of Darmstadt, Germany

Philipp Pattberg

Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Abstract

Scholars have recently devoted increasing attention to the role and function of international bureaucracies in global policymaking. Some of them contend that international public officials have gained significant political influence in various policy fields. Compared to other international bureaucracies, the political leeway of the Secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change has been considered rather limited. Due to the specific problem structure of the policy domain of climate change, national governments endowed this intergovernmental treaty secretariat with a relatively narrow mandate. However, this article argues that in the past few years, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

Corresponding author:

Thomas Hickmann, University of Potsdam, Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences, August-Bebel-Str. 89, 14482 Potsdam, Germany.

Email: hickmann@uni-potsdam.de

Secretariat has gradually loosened its straitjacket and expanded its original spectrum of activity by engaging different sub-national and non-state actors into a policy dialogue using *facilitative orchestration* as a mode of governance. The present article explores the recent evolution of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Secretariat and investigates the way in which it initiates, guides, broadens and strengthens sub-national and non-state climate actions to achieve progress in the international climate negotiations.

Points for practitioners

The Secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change has lately adopted new roles and functions in global climate policymaking. While previously seen as a rather technocratic body that, first and foremost, serves national governments, the Climate Secretariat increasingly interacts with sub-national governments, civil society organizations and private companies to push the global response to climate change forward. We contend that the Climate Secretariat can contribute to global climate policymaking by coordinating and steering the initiatives of non-nation-state actors towards coherence and good practice.

Keywords

climate change, environmental policymaking, intergovernmental relations, international bureaucracies, sub-national and non-state actors

Introduction

Several scholars of international relations and public administration have lately put much effort into studying international bureaucracies (Bauer et al., 2017). Particularly in the realm of international environmental politics, numerous case studies have been conducted on the impacts of different types of international bureaucracies on policy outcomes (e.g. Bauer, 2006; Biermann and Siebenhüner, 2009a; Jinnah, 2014; Jörgens et al., 2017; Widerberg and Van Laerhoven, 2014). The political influence of the Secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) has been considered rather limited when compared to other international environmental bureaucracies. In 2009, Busch (2009) portrayed the role of the UNFCCC Secretariat as 'Making a Living in a Straitjacket'. He argued that nation-states endowed this bureaucracy with a relatively narrow mandate and attributed its limited influence to the specific problem structure of the issue of the policy domain of climate change.

However, we claim that the UNFCCC Secretariat has recently found new leveraging opportunities by engaging non-nation-state actors in policy dialogues. In fact, the UNFCCC Secretariat increasingly reaches out and works together with sub-national bodies, such as cities or regions, non-governmental organizations, and civil society groups, as well as private companies and their associations, to pursue common policy

goals. The new role of the UNFCCC Secretariat in global climate policymaking can be understood as a case of ‘orchestration’ (Abbott and Bernstein, 2015; Bäckstrand and Kuyper, 2017; Widerberg, 2017). Orchestration is an indirect mode of governance where a given agent (i.e. the orchestrator) uses one or more intermediaries to influence a target group. To do this, the orchestrator employs various techniques and different facilitative measures to work with intermediary actors.

In this article, we conceptualize the UNFCCC Secretariat as an orchestrator that strategically interacts with sub-national and non-state actors to motivate national governments to take a more ambitious stance on climate change. We analyse three recent initiatives in which the UNFCCC Secretariat interacts with sub-national and non-state actors: (1) the *Momentum for Change Initiative*; (2) the *Lima–Paris Action Agenda* (LPAA); and (3) the *Non-State Actor Zone for Climate Action* (NAZCA). In these initiatives, the UNFCCC Secretariat has adopted varying roles and functions that we investigate in the present article. Thus, the main contribution of this article is an empirical illumination of the way in which the UNFCCC Secretariat has used *facilitative orchestration* as a mode of governance in an attempt to achieve progress in the international climate negotiations.

The analysis underlines that the UNFCCC Secretariat has put much effort into pushing the global response to climate change forward by initiating, guiding, broadening and strengthening the myriad climate actions taken by sub-national governments, civil society organizations and private companies. In this endeavour, the Secretariat acted: as a *spearheading institution* in support of pioneering small-scale climate projects; as a *convening body* together with other orchestrators to encourage state and non-state climate actions; and as a *manager and coordinating node* to highlight existing climate measures on the ground. This article hence suggests that the UNFCCC Secretariat has been able to loosen its straitjacket, demonstrating its capacity to be an autonomous actor in global climate policymaking. In a nutshell, we contend that the UNFCCC Secretariat has gradually expanded its spectrum of activity and thereby stretched its original mandate in a creative way.

The article is structured as follows. In the second section, we situate our study in the literature on the growing importance of international bureaucracies in global (environmental) policymaking. In the third section, we conceptualize the UNFCCC Secretariat as a facilitative orchestrator and describe our data-collection methods. In the fourth section, we turn to the empirical analysis and first provide a brief overview of the UNFCCC Secretariat before we focus on three recent orchestration initiatives in which the Secretariat interacts with sub-national and non-state actors. Finally, we draw conclusions about the role and function of the UNFCCC Secretariat as a facilitative orchestrator and point to aspects that merit attention in future research.

The growing importance of international bureaucracies

Over the past decades, authors from different fields have highlighted the increasing influence of international organizations on global policymaking. This includes

studies from sociology, International Relations and public policy (e.g. Abbott et al., 2015; Béland and Orenstein, 2013; Jakobi, 2012; Keohane and Nye, 1974; Meyer et al., 1997). While most of these studies have not looked deeper into the inner workings of international organizations, we recently witnessed a growing scholarly interest in the roles and functions of international bureaucracies and their staff members in global public policy (e.g. Ege and Bauer, 2013).

Some sceptics continue to doubt that the bureaucracies of international public agencies have any significant impact beyond that of technical assistance and services to national governments (Drezner, 2007). Yet, an increasing number of authors contend that international bureaucracies can acquire significant autonomy in various domains of global policymaking (e.g. Bauer and Ege, 2016; Fraser-Moleketi, 2003; Maggetti and Verhoest, 2014). In line with these scholars, we perceive international bureaucracies as distinct actors and argue that they have adopted important policymaking tasks. International bureaucracies, for instance, put existing problems on the political agenda, collect, analyze and spread knowledge, stimulate public debates, organize discussions among stakeholders, support civil society actors in international negotiations, and help to implement internationally agreed norms and rules.

The field of global environmental politics is of particular interest for examining the evolution of international bureaucracies. This domain has been characterized as 'one of the institutionally most dynamic areas in world politics regarding the number of international institutions and actors that have emerged over the past three decades' (Biermann and Siebenhüner, 2009b: 9). A case in point is the International Environmental Agreements Database Project, which currently comprises over 1300 multilateral agreements and more than 2200 bilateral agreements (Mitchell, 2018). Hence, it is no surprise that several authors have conceptualized international environmental bureaucracies as actors that pursue certain policies that cannot entirely be controlled by their respective national governments (e.g. Jörgens et al., 2016; Steffek, 2013; Van der Lugt and Dingwerth, 2015).

While these studies have provided important insights into the growing importance of international bureaucracies in global environmental policymaking, only scant attention has been paid to their interplay with sub-national and non-state actors. In other words, researchers have made considerable progress in understanding the principal-agent relationship between international environmental bureaucracies and national governments (Hawkins et al., 2006). However, we still lack knowledge on how these bureaucracies interact with the plethora of sub-national and non-state actors that engage in global and transnational policymaking in various ways. This knowledge gap is important to fill considering the key role that non-nation-state actors have come to play in the global response to environmental problems (e.g. Bulkeley et al., 2014; Hickmann, 2016). Therefore, this article takes a first step towards bridging this research gap by focusing on the UNFCCC Secretariat's interplay with sub-national and non-state actors.

Conceptualizing the UNFCCC Secretariat as an orchestrator

Orchestration is a mode of governance that has gained increasing prominence among global public policy researchers after it was popularized by Abbott and Snidal in 2009. The two authors argue that a new regulatory structure has started to emerge from the ashes of the ‘old governance system’, where sub-national and non-state actors play a much more pronounced part by creating innovative transnational norms for regulating businesses (Abbott and Snidal, 2009). Voluntary standards, such as those created for carbon accounting and reporting (Green, 2013; Hickmann, 2017b), are changing the global system of rules and norms from traditional state-based modes of governance towards a more heterogeneous, hybrid and polycentric structure (Abbott et al., 2016; Hickmann, 2017a; Jordan et al., 2018). International organizations could use these transnational institutions to ‘attain transnational regulatory goals that are not achievable through domestic or international Old Governance’ (Abbott and Snidal, 2009: 564).

Following this conceptualization, Hale and Roger (2014: 60–61) define orchestration as ‘a process whereby states or intergovernmental organizations initiate, guide, broaden, and strengthen transnational governance by non-state and/or sub-state actors’. Orchestration moves beyond existing hierarchical models of other conceptual approaches (e.g. principle–agent theory). It follows a so-called *O-I-T* model, in which an *Orchestrator* uses an *Intermediary* to influence a certain *Target* group. International organizations can make use of various types of intermediaries, such as transnational networks, non-governmental organizations or public–private partnerships (Abbott et al., 2015: 6). Orchestrators have a wide range of techniques at their disposal to influence intermediaries, including direct assistance, endorsement or coordination. In theory, the orchestrator can choose to *manage* or *bypass* its targets. In the case of intergovernmental agencies as orchestrators, they can thus fulfil their policy purpose without needing ‘time-consuming, high-level political approval’ (Abbott and Snidal, 2009: 564).

In particular, Abbott and Snidal distinguish between (1) *directive* and (2) *facilitative* orchestration. Since international organizations and bureaucracies usually lack direct enforcement powers, they largely rely on facilitative measures to work with intermediaries. Facilitative orchestration is ‘softer’ than directive orchestration and draws on a variety of governance tools. Facilitative orchestrators can, for instance, provide material and/or ideational support, endorse and enhance the legitimacy of initiatives, or engage in knowledge production and the distribution of relevant information (Abbott and Snidal, 2009: 576–577). So far, however, these forms of facilitative orchestration have not been very well understood in practice. In fact, while the orchestration literature has considerably improved our conceptual understanding of the influence exerted by international organizations and their bureaucracies on global policymaking, it is empirically still underdeveloped with regard to the concrete roles and functions adopted by orchestrators vis-a-vis their intermediaries. For that reason, this article investigates the UNFCCC

Secretariat as a facilitative orchestrator in its attempt to achieve progress in the international climate negotiations.

In our analysis, we employed three methods of qualitative data collection. First, we conducted an extensive desk study of the existing scholarly work on international environmental bureaucracies, with a particular focus on the UNFCCC Secretariat. Second, we carried out a systematic content analysis of official documents, online material and 'grey' literature on the different initiatives in which the UNFCCC Secretariat interacts with sub-national and non-state actors. Here, we selected sources that we considered representative of the whole data material (see the UNFCCC and United Nations entries in the References). Finally, we conducted a series of 17 semi-structured expert interviews with staff members of the UNFCCC Secretariat and policy experts working close to the Secretariat. Such interviews encompass a number of potential deficiencies, including selection bias, false information and misinterpretation, but they constitute an essential qualitative research method. We recognize the benefits of qualitative interviews and have addressed their shortcomings by interviewing staff members from different administrative units and complementing these insights with numerous background talks with representatives from sub-national bodies and non-governmental organizations (Bogner et al., 2009).

The evolution of the UNFCCC Secretariat

The origins of the UNFCCC Secretariat can be traced back to early 1991. At that time, the then Secretary-General of the United Nations (UN), Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, assigned a higher official in the UN Conference on Trade and Development with the task to build up a team of about a dozen people to support the negotiations that led to the adoption of the UNFCCC in 1992 (Yamin and Depledge, 2004: 487). Thereafter, the administration of the international climate regime under the auspices of the UN has evolved considerably. When the UNFCCC Secretariat formally came into being in January 1996, it comprised 44 staff members and had an annual budget of around US\$5 million (Depledge, 2005). After a steady increase in tasks and personnel over the past two decades, the UNFCCC Secretariat now employs about 500 people and has an annual budget of approximately US\$90 million (UNFCCC, 2017g). The official tasks of the UNFCCC Secretariat include: supporting the annual Conferences of the Parties (COPs) and their subsidiary bodies; compiling and reviewing data and information provided by the parties; and coordinating with the bureaucracies of related international organizations and other intergovernmental treaty secretariats.

Several scholars have studied the role and function of the UNFCCC Secretariat in global climate policymaking over the past few years (Bauer et al., 2009; Busch, 2009; Depledge, 2005, 2007; Jörgens et al., 2016; Michaelowa and Michaelowa, 2016; Yamin and Depledge, 2004: 500–508). These authors have provided various insights concerning the impact of the UNFCCC Secretariat on global climate policymaking in general and on the outcome of the international climate

negotiations in particular. All these scholars concede that the UNFCCC Secretariat performs an important function in the bureaucratic organization of the intergovernmental negotiations and the support of the various associated institutions. Yet, most authors have rated the broader political influence of the UNFCCC Secretariat as rather low, while only a few recent accounts hold that the Secretariat has lately assumed a more significant role in global climate policy-making (Jørgens et al., 2016; Michaelowa and Michaelowa, 2016).

Busch (2009: 251) most prominently claims that '[t]he climate secretariat is a "technocratic bureaucracy" that has not had any autonomous political influence'. As indicated earlier, he identifies the particular problem structure of the policy domain of climate change as a main reason for the limited leeway and political influence of the UNFCCC Secretariat. Due to the fear of powerful nation-states that a far-reaching international climate agreement will have negative consequences for their national economies, so his argument goes, the negotiating parties observe the Secretariat's activities with great caution. As a result, Busch (2009: 256) contends that the UNFCCC Secretariat has been put into a 'straitjacket [that] reduces the potential for the climate secretariat to effectively exploit its key position and to have autonomous influence'.

However, the UNFCCC Secretariat has lately been involved in a number of initiatives that seek to incorporate local and regional governments, non-governmental organizations, and private entities more directly into a policy dialogue. These increasing support and facilitation activities suggest that the UNFCCC Secretariat has found a way to escape from its straitjacket. The following analysis first traces the evolution of the relationship between the UNFCCC Secretariat and non-nation-state actors. After that, we use the concept of orchestration as an analytical lens and focus on three recent examples of how the Secretariat has sought to expand its influence in global climate policymaking by interacting with a wide range of sub-national and non-state actors in the issue-area of climate change.

The UNFCCC Secretariat and sub-national and non-state actors

The UNFCCC Secretariat has a long tradition of working together with non-governmental organizations. Since the first COP held in Berlin in 1995, the UNFCCC Secretariat has been coordinating the participation of the growing number of so-called *observer organizations* in the international climate conferences and the various accompanying events. Moreover, it has taken responsibility for the administration of side-events conducted by all kinds of non-governmental organizations. By these means, the UNFCCC Secretariat creates an ongoing forum for these actors and organizes informal exchanges between different stakeholders that provide input to the negotiations and stimulate debates on a great variety of topics connected to the issue of climate change (Schroeder and Lovell, 2012).

The 17th COP to the UNFCCC held in Durban in 2011 and the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action provided a novel opportunity for the UNFCCC Secretariat to interact with sub-national and

non-state actors (UNFCCC, 2011b). This working group was divided in two work streams. Under work stream 1, national governments negotiated a new legally binding agreement, which eventually led to the adoption of the Paris Agreement in 2015 (UNFCCC, 2015b). Work stream 2 aimed at reducing the existing emission gap and established a framework for short- to medium-term mitigation measures by national and sub-national governments, civil society groups, and private companies. The UNFCCC Secretariat had two important tasks relating to sub-national and non-state actors. First, it conducted ‘Technical Expert Meetings’ involving both public and private actors ‘to share policies, practices and technologies and address the necessary finance, technology and capacity building, with a special focus on actions with high mitigation potential’ (UNFCCC, 2014b: 6). Second, the Secretariat published ‘Technical Papers’ that acknowledged the important contribution of sub-national and non-state actors for enhancing the global ambition to address climate change (Widerberg and Pattberg, 2015). In addition, the Secretariat compiled a database on ‘International Cooperative Initiatives’ undertaken by national and sub-national governments, as well as non-governmental organizations (UNFCCC, 2017f).

While such actions of the UNFCCC Secretariat to integrate sub-national and non-state measures into the global response to climate change can be considered to fall within its original mandate, the remainder of the analysis focuses on three initiatives in which the Secretariat incorporates non-nation-state actors more directly into a policy dialogue. We selected these initiatives as they are widely recognized as the most prominent outreach activities of the UNFCCC Secretariat. In these initiatives, sub-national governments, non-governmental organizations and private corporations are not merely observers of the international negotiations, but implement climate projects by themselves. According to a staff member of the UNFCCC Secretariat, the new strategy that has been pursued by the Executive Secretary after the Copenhagen Climate Summit was to reach beyond the ‘usual conference hoppers’¹ and hence constitutes a qualitative shift in the interplay of the UNFCCC Secretariat with sub-national and non-state actors.

The Momentum for Change Initiative

An early initiative that has been spearheaded by the UNFCCC Secretariat is the *Momentum for Change Initiative* (UNFCCC, 2011a). It was officially presented to the public in 2011 to ‘get a sense of optimism’ into the negotiations and to ‘showcase real practical climate solutions’.² Interestingly, the initiative has not been directly funded through the UNFCCC Secretariat’s budget as such activities would not have been covered by its mandate. Instead, the team around Christiana Figueres, the former UNFCCC Executive Secretary, started to contact institutions like the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Women in Sustainability, Environment and Renewable Energy Initiative, the World Economic Forum, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the E-Sustainability Initiative to gather funds. In this way, the Secretariat circumvented the risk that national governments might criticize the use of the official budget. In the end,

many UNFCCC parties welcomed the process, which surprised those staff members who were involved in the project from the beginning.³

The proclaimed goal of this initiative is ‘to shine a light on the enormous groundswell of activities underway across the globe that are moving the world towards a highly resilient, low-carbon future’ (UNFCCC, 2017d). To this end, the initiative recognizes a number of ‘Lighthouse Activities’, which are described as innovative and transformative solutions offered by civil society and business actors. They address both climate-related aspects and wider economic, social and environmental challenges in a given geographical area. On the initiative’s official webpage, these particular activities are described as ‘practical, scalable and replicable examples of what people, businesses, governments and industries are doing to tackle climate change’ (UNFCCC, 2017d).

Since 2012, the initiative confers the ‘Momentum for Change Awards’ to particularly successful climate change mitigation or adaptation projects conducted by non-nation-state actors from around the world. In the past few years, the UNFCCC Secretariat has put considerable efforts into further developing this initiative. In particular, it established numerous partnerships with the private sector to engage in mutually beneficial collaborative interactions in order to raise public awareness on climate actions taking place on the ground (e.g. UNFCCC, 2012, 2015a, 2017e). In late 2016, four staff members were working on this initiative.⁴ Among insiders, it has been described as Figueres’ ‘pet initiative’, and when asked how the project evolved, a responsible public official answered ‘only the sky is the limit’.⁵ Hence, the UNFCCC Secretariat has offered material and ideational support to non-state actors in order to create demonstration effects for national governments that climate mitigation measures are possible. This is a first clear indication of the role played by the UNFCCC Secretariat as a facilitative orchestrator in global climate policymaking.

The LPAA

The LPAA was launched during the 20th COP held in Lima in December 2014 in the run-up to the Paris Climate Summit, which should set a milestone in the global response to climate change. The primary goal of the LPAA was to boost the positive momentum created by high-level conferences in Abu Dhabi and New York organized by the UN Secretary-General’s Office throughout 2014 that specifically targeted sub-national and non-state actors. The LPAA was jointly launched by the Peruvian and French COP Presidencies, the Executive Office of the UN Secretary-General, and the UNFCCC Secretariat (United Nations, 2015). The common intention of this consortium of actors was to accelerate the climate engagement of all parts of society and to build concrete, ambitious and lasting climate actions that reduce global greenhouse gas emissions and promote measures to better adapt to the adverse effects of climate change (UNFCCC, 2017b).

While the UNFCCC Secretariat played only a relatively small part in the preparation and launch of the initiative, it adopted an increasingly substantial role in

the implementation process in 2015. The Secretariat was part of the team supervising the initiative and occupied two seats in its Steering Committee, which has been responsible for the initiative's strategic development and implementation. Moreover, prior to the COP in Paris, the Secretariat, together with the Peruvian and French governments, as well as the Executive Office of the UN Secretary-General (UNFCCC, 2017b), published a policy paper that called for the further evolution of the initiative. However, because of its limited capacities, the contribution of the UNFCCC Secretariat did not go as far as some of the other partners in the LPAA that provided temporary administrative bodies (Widerberg, 2017).

Nevertheless, the LPAA allowed the UNFCCC Secretariat to explore new territory as it involved nation-states, cities, regions and other sub-national entities, international organizations, civil society groups, indigenous peoples, women, youth, academic institutions, and companies and investors.⁶ It was designed to catalyse climate actions in the short term, especially by providing an impetus towards the end of 2015 and supporting the negotiation of a new agreement, as well as in the long term, both before and after the Paris Agreement takes effect in 2020. The UNFCCC Secretariat has acted as a co-convener of this initiative, which aimed to encourage actors from all societal fields and political levels to take action on climate change. In this way, the Secretariat has considerably endorsed the LPAA and enhanced its legitimacy. This is further evidence that the UNFCCC Secretariat has adopted the function of a facilitative orchestrator in global climate policymaking.

NAZCA

The most prominent contribution of the UNFCCC Secretariat in terms of bringing sub-national and non-state actors closer to the UNFCCC has been the launch and maintenance of non-state NAZCA. In 2014, the UNFCCC Secretariat supported the Peruvian government in the launch of NAZCA, which is an online platform to coordinate the various climate-related measures of sub-national and non-state actors and to register their individual commitments (Chan et al., 2015: 468). The aim of this initiative is to improve the visibility of climate projects by non-nation-state actors (UNFCCC, 2017a). In particular, NAZCA seeks to demonstrate that sub-national and non-state climate action is rising and showcases the 'extraordinary range of game-changing actions being undertaken by thousands of cities, investors and corporations' (UNFCCC, 2014a).

The idea behind this strategy is that national governments would be more inclined to reach an ambitious agreement if they knew that their constituencies also favoured strong climate action (Widerberg, 2017). In this regard, Michael Jacobs (2016: 322) argues that:

[b]y orchestrating the narratives of science and economics to demand strong climate action, and organising the business community, NGOs [non-governmental

organizations] and many others in support of a strong agreement, it was civil society that pressured governments into the positions that made the final negotiations possible.

The NAZCA platform draws on data from established sources with a strong record of reporting and tracking progress, such as the Carbon Disclosure Project and the Carbons (sic) Climate Registry. As of early 2017, the platform comprised 12,549 total commitments, out of which, 2508 have been announced by cities, 209 by regions, 2138 by companies, 479 by investors and 238 by civil society organizations (UNFCCC, 2017c).

The UNFCCC Secretariat is the manager and coordinating node of this initiative and has regularly carried out consultations with stakeholders on potential improvements of the database. This indicates that the Secretariat has recently expanded its role and function in climate policymaking and works together with actors other than national governments in the pursuit of the general aim to enhance the global mitigation ambition. In this context, a staff member of the UNFCCC Secretariat noticed that NAZCA also contributed to the formal inclusion of sub-national and non-state actors into the Paris Agreement, ‘shining a light on the numerous existing successful climate actions’.⁷ Thus, the Secretariat has produced knowledge on existing sub-national and non-state climate measures, and has strived to spread such information to propel the intergovernmental negotiations. Once again, this underlines that the UNFCCC Secretariat has become a facilitative orchestrator in global climate policymaking.

Summary and discussion

The analysis focused on three recent initiatives in which the UNFCCC Secretariat interacts with sub-national and non-state actors. In the *Momentum for Change Initiative*, the Secretariat fostered a close collaboration with civil society organizations and the private sector to showcase lighthouse climate measures. In the LPAA, it co-led and strategically developed the initiative together with the Peruvian and French COP Presidencies, as well as the Executive Office of the UN Secretary-General in the run-up to the 2015 international climate negotiations in Paris. Finally, the Secretariat put considerable efforts into the launch and maintenance of the NAZCA platform to highlight existing climate actions on the ground. These activities illustrate the fact that the UNFCCC Secretariat has used facilitative orchestration as a mode of governance to influence its target group and achieve progress in the international climate negotiations.

More precisely, the UNFCCC Secretariat has employed a range of facilitative measures and techniques in respect to sub-national and non-state actors in order to induce national governments to adopt a more ambitious stance on combating climate change. The analysis has shown that the Secretariat has acted: (1) as a *spearheading institution* to provide material and ideational support for small-scale climate projects developed by civil society organizations and the private sector; (2)

as a *convening body* to endorse and enhance the legitimacy of an initiative that aims to encourage climate actions from all societal fields and political levels; and (3) as a *manager and coordinating node* to produce knowledge and distribute relevant information about climate measures undertaken by sub-national bodies, non-governmental organizations and private companies.

In addition, the UNFCCC Secretariat used the different initiatives for a new communication strategy, reaching out to the media and certain celebrities.⁸ This is in line with findings provided by Jörgens and colleagues (2017) who recently termed the Secretariat an ‘attention-seeking bureaucracy’. In other words, the UNFCCC Secretariat essentially acted according to the principle ‘Do good and make it known’. Policy-wise, the overall objective of these initiatives is to reinvigorate the global response to climate change by emphasizing the pioneering mitigation and adaptation activities of sub-national and non-state actors. In this manner, momentum has been built up for an increased level of ambition to address the problem of climate change, which was conducive for the successful negotiation of the Paris Agreement.⁹ Thus, the UNFCCC Secretariat can no longer be adequately described as a purely technocratic international environmental bureaucracy.

We identify three reasons for this development. First, the widely perceived failure of the 15th COP held in Copenhagen in 2009 and the resulting legitimacy crisis of the multilateral process paved the way for new approaches (Bäckstrand, 2011). With the disappointing negotiating outcome, the UNFCCC parties apparently became more open for new ideas to bolster the existing global response to climate change (Chan et al., 2015). Second, sub-national and non-state actors no longer waited for guidance from national governments. Instead, they started to launch their own climate actions (Bulkeley et al., 2014). Such transnational initiatives have been developed by various actors from different backgrounds, such as sub-national public bodies, non-profit organizations and private corporations. This resonated well with the ‘zeitgeist’ that global public goods could not be provided by inter-governmental processes alone, but could only be generated in various forms of partnerships (Andonova, 2017; Betsill et al., 2015). Third, the core leadership team within the UNFCCC Secretariat was particularly interested in working together with other actors than the parties to move the international climate negotiations forward after the shock of the Copenhagen COP. In particular, Christiana Figueres realized that a positive spin would be necessary to arouse the climate change community from its frustration and the apathy into which it was plunged.¹⁰

In sum, the UNFCCC Secretariat used a window of opportunity to reach out to and involve sub-national and non-state actors in order to raise the global level of ambition to address the issue of climate change. Through its outreach strategy and policy dialogue with actors other than national governments, the Secretariat provided impetus for a variety of climate-related projects in all parts of the world carried out by local and regional governments, non-profit entities and private businesses. These findings imply that the UNFCCC Secretariat has found a way

to loosen its straitjacket and significantly expand its political influence in global climate policymaking.

Conclusion

Building upon the concept of orchestration, this article investigated the UNFCCC Secretariat as an illustrative case of a facilitative orchestrator. The analysis has demonstrated how the Secretariat initiates, guides, broadens and strengthens sub-national and non-state climate actions. By these means, the UNFCCC Secretariat seeks to achieve progress in the international climate negotiations and to enhance the overall effectiveness of the global climate governance landscape (Chan et al., 2015; Van Asselt and Zelli, 2014). In principle, this approach could be expanded in order to allow sub-national and non-state actors to make a more substantial impact in global climate policymaking. The main challenge is thereby to design the UNFCCC process in such a way that the actions of sub-national and non-state actors 'become not substitutes or even complements to a global treaty, but stepping stones on the path to a higher climate ambition that an effective treaty will require' (Hale, 2013: 2).

These ideas bear important policy implications and point to new avenues for further research. In every policy domain where collective action dilemmas have to be overcome and the interests of nation-states diverge, international bureaucracies can contribute to solving trans boundary problems by coordinating and steering the initiatives of non-nation-state actors towards coherence and good practice (e.g. Abbott and Hale, 2014). More specifically, when intergovernmental negotiations get stuck in gridlock – as is currently the case in several issue-areas of global politics – international bureaucracies might turn to sub-national and non-state actors in order to mobilize advocacy, create demonstration effects or otherwise pressure national governments to initiate progress in multilateral treaty-making (cf. Abbott, 2014). Whether, in the end, these initiatives are successful in setting up more effective and legitimate international public institutions, however, remains an open question that warrants further investigation.

From a practical perspective, we contend that there is a great potential for increased interaction between sub-national and non-state actors and international bureaucracies. We therefore recommend the further strengthening of the role and function of the UNFCCC Secretariat, as well as other international public agencies, and opening up the intergovernmental process for the initiatives of sub-national governments, civil society organizations and private companies in order to push the global response to pressing trans boundary challenges forward.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Frank Biermann, Joshua Elsässer, Nina Hall, David Held, Katharina Rietig, Charles Roger, Paul Tobin, Jale Tosun and Fariborz Zelli, as well as two anonymous reviewers, for valuable comments on earlier versions of this article, and are grateful to our interview partners for their time and effort to share their insights.


Declaration of conflicting interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

ORCID iD

Thomas Hickmann  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-5072-7855>

Notes

1. Interview with Ian Ponce, Programme Officer with the UNFCCC Secretariat in the area of Strategy and Relationship Management, October 2016 in Bonn.
2. Interview with Luis Dávila, Programme Officer with the UNFCCC Secretariat in the Momentum for Change Initiative, October 2016 in Bonn.
3. Interview with a former staff member of the UNFCCC Secretariat who wished to remain anonymous, May 2017 in Bonn.
4. Interview with Luis Dávila, Programme Officer with the UNFCCC Secretariat in the Momentum for Change Initiative, October 2016 in Bonn.
5. Interview with a former staff member of the UNFCCC Secretariat who wished to remain anonymous, October 2016 in Bonn.
6. Interview with Ian Ponce, Programme Officer with the UNFCCC Secretariat in the area of Strategy and Relationship Management, October 2016 in Bonn.
7. Interview with Ian Ponce, Programme Officer with the UNFCCC Secretariat in the area of Strategy and Relationship Management, October 2016 in Bonn.
8. Interview with Luis Dávila, Programme Officer with the UNFCCC Secretariat in the Momentum for Change Initiative, October 2016 in Bonn.
9. Interviews with two former staff members of the UNFCCC Secretariat who wished to remain anonymous, October 2016 and May 2017 in Bonn.
10. Skype interview with a policy expert working close to the UNFCCC Secretariat, March 2016.

References

- Abbott KW (2014) Strengthening the transnational regime complex for climate change. *Transnational Environmental Law* 3: 57–88.
- Abbott KW and Bernstein S (2015) The high-level political forum on sustainable development: Orchestration by default and design. *Global Policy* 6: 222–233.
- Abbott KW and Hale T (2014) *Orchestrating Global Solution Networks: A Guide for Organizational Entrepreneurs*. Toronto: Global Solution Networks.
- Abbott KW and Snidal D (2009) Strengthening international regulation through transnational new governance: Overcoming the orchestration deficit. *Vanderbilt Journal of Transnational Law* 42: 501–578.

- Abbott KW, Genschel P, Snidal D, et al. (2015) *International Organizations as Orchestrators*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.
- Abbott KW, Green JF and Keohane RO (2016) Organizational ecology and institutional change in global governance. *International Organization* 70: 247–277.
- Andonova LB (2017) *Governance Entrepreneurs: International Organizations and the Rise of Global Public–Private Partnerships*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.
- Bäckstrand K (2011) The democratic legitimacy of global climate governance after Copenhagen. In: Dryzek JS, Norgaard RB, Schlosberg D (eds) *Oxford Handbook of Climate Change and Society*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 669–684.
- Bäckstrand K and Kuyper JW (2017) The democratic legitimacy of orchestration: The UNFCCC, non-state actors, and transnational climate governance. *Environmental Politics* 26: 764–788.
- Bauer MW and Ege J (2016) Bureaucratic autonomy of international organizations' secretariats. *Journal of European Public Policy* 23: 1019–1037.
- Bauer MW, Knill C and Eckhard S (2017) *International Bureaucracy: Challenges and Lessons for Public Administration Research*. London: Springer.
- Bauer S (2006) Does bureaucracy really matter? The authority of intergovernmental treaty secretariats in global environmental politics. *Global Environmental Politics* 6: 23–49.
- Bauer S, Busch P-O and Siebenhüner B (2009) Treaty secretariats in global environmental governance. In: Biermann F, Siebenhüner B and Schreyögg A (eds) *International Organizations in Global Environmental Governance*. London: Routledge, pp. 174–191.
- Béland D and Orenstein MA (2013) International organizations as policy actors: An ideational approach. *Global Social Policy* 13: 125–143.
- Betsill M, Dubash N, Paterson M, et al. (2015) Building productive links between the UNFCCC and the broader global climate governance landscape. *Global Environmental Politics* 15: 1–10.
- Biermann F and Siebenhüner B (2009a) *Managers of Global Change: The Influence of International Environmental Bureaucracies*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Biermann F and Siebenhüner B (2009b) The role and relevance of international bureaucracies: Setting the stage. In: Biermann F and Siebenhüner B (eds) *Managers of Global Change: The Influence of International Environmental Bureaucracies*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, pp. 1–14.
- Bogner A, Littig B and Menz W (2009) *Interviewing Experts*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bulkeley H, Andonova L, Betsill M, et al. (2014) *Transnational Climate Change Governance*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Busch P-O (2009) The climate Secretariat: Making a living in a straitjacket. In: Biermann F and Siebenhüner B (eds) *Managers of Global Change: The Influence of International Environmental Bureaucracies*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, pp. 245–264.
- Chan S, Asselt Hv, Hale T, et al. (2015) Reinvigorating international climate policy: A comprehensive framework for effective nonstate action. *Global Policy* 6: 466–473.
- Depledge J (2005) *The Organization of International Negotiations: Constructing the Climate Change Regime*. London: Earthscan.
- Depledge J (2007) A special relationship: Chairpersons and the Secretariat in the climate change negotiations. *Global Environmental Politics* 7: 45–68.
- Drezner DW (2007) *All Politics Is Global: Explaining International Regulatory Regimes*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

- Ege J and Bauer MW (2013) International bureaucracies from a public administration and International Relations perspective. In: Renalda B (Ed.) *Routledge Handbook of International Organization*. London: Routledge, pp. 135–148.
- Fraser-Moleketi GJ (2003) Quality governance for sustainable growth and development: Introduction. *International Review of Administrative Sciences* 69: 463–470.
- Green JF (2013) Order out of chaos: Public and private rules for managing carbon. *Global Environmental Politics* 13: 1–25.
- Hale T (2013) *How the UNFCCC Can Drive Climate Ambition in Advance of a Treaty: Record, Review, Reinforce, Recruit*. Oxford: Blavatnik School of Government.
- Hale T and Roger C (2014) Orchestration and transnational climate governance. *Review of International Organizations* 9: 59–82.
- Hawkins DG, Lake DA, Nielson DL, et al. (2006) *Delegation and agency in international organizations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hickmann T (2016) *Rethinking Authority in Global Climate Governance: How Transnational Climate Initiatives Relate to the International Climate Regime*. London: Routledge.
- Hickmann T (2017a) The reconfiguration of authority in global climate governance. *International Studies Review* 19: 430–451.
- Hickmann T (2017b) Voluntary global business initiatives and the international climate negotiations: A case study of the Greenhouse Gas Protocol. *Journal of Cleaner Production* 169: 94–104.
- Jacobs M (2016) High pressure for low emissions: How civil society created the Paris Climate Agreement. *Juncture* 22: 314–323.
- Jakobi AP (2012) International organisations and policy diffusion: The global norm of lifelong learning. *Journal of International Relations and Development* 15: 31–64.
- Jinnah S (2014) *Post-Treaty Politics: Secretariat Influence in Global Environmental Governance*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Jordan A, Huitema D, Van Asselt H, et al. (2018) *Governing Climate Change: Polycentricity in Action?* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Jörgens H, Kolleck N and Saerbeck B (2016) Exploring the hidden influence of international treaty secretariats: Using social network analysis to analyse the Twitter debate on the ‘Lima Work Programme on Gender’. *Journal of European Public Policy* 23: 979–998.
- Jörgens H, Kolleck N, Saerbeck B, et al. (2017) Orchestrating (bio-)diversity: The Secretariat of the Convention of Biological Diversity as an attention-seeking bureaucracy. In: Bauer MW, Knill C and Eckhard S (eds) *International Bureaucracy: Challenges and Lessons for Public Administration Research*. London: Palgrave, pp. 73–95.
- Keohane RO and Nye JS (1974) Transgovernmental relations and international organizations. *World Politics* 27: 39–62.
- Maggetti M and Verhoest K (2014) Unexplored aspects of bureaucratic autonomy: A state of the field and ways forward. *International Review of Administrative Sciences* 80: 239–256.
- Meyer JW, Frank DJ, Hironaka A, et al. (1997) The structuring of a world environmental regime, 1870–1990. *International Organization* 51: 623–651.
- Michaelowa A and Michaelowa K (2016) The growing influence of the UNFCCC Secretariat on the clean development mechanism. *International Environmental Agreements Online First*: 1–23.
- Mitchell RB (2018) International Environmental Agreements Database Project. Available at: <https://iea.uoregon.edu/>

- Schroeder H and Lovell H (2012) The role of non-nation-state actors and side events in the international climate negotiations. *Climate Policy* 12: 23–37.
- Steffek J (2013) Explaining cooperation between IGOs and NGOs: Push factors, pull factors, and the policy cycle. *Review of International Studies* 39: 993–1013.
- UNFCCC (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) (2011a) *Momentum for Change: Launch Report*. Bonn: UNFCCC Secretariat.
- UNFCCC (2011b) *Report of the Conference of the Parties on Its Seventeenth Session, held in Durban from November 28 to December 11, 2011: Addendum: Part Two: Action Taken by the Conference of the Parties at Its Seventeenth Session*. FCCC/CP/2011/9/Add.2. Bonn: UNFCCC Secretariat.
- UNFCCC (2012) *Momentum for Change in 2012: Momentum for Change – Change for Good*. Bonn: UNFCCC Secretariat.
- UNFCCC (2014a) *New Portal Highlights City and Private Sector Climate Action*. Press release of the UNFCCC Secretariat, 11 December. Bonn: UNFCCC Secretariat.
- UNFCCC (2014b) *Report of the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action on the Third Part of Its Second Session, held in Warsaw from 12 to 23 November 2013*. FCCC/ADP/2013/3. Bonn: UNFCCC Secretariat.
- UNFCCC (2015a) *Momentum for Change: 2015 Lighthouse Activities*. Bonn: UNFCCC Secretariat.
- UNFCCC (2015b) *Report of the Conference of the Parties on Its Twenty-First Session, held in Paris from November 30 to December 13, 2015. Addendum: Part Two: Action Taken by the Conference of the Parties at Its Twenty-First Session*. Bonn: UNFCCC Secretariat.
- UNFCCC (2017a) About NAZCA. Available at: <http://climateaction.unfccc.int/views/about.html>
- UNFCCC (2017b) About the Lima–Paris Action Agenda. Available at: <http://newsroom.unfccc.int/lpaa/about/>
- UNFCCC (2017c) The Lima–Paris Action Agenda: Cooperative initiatives. Available at: <http://climateaction.unfccc.int/>
- UNFCCC (2017d) Momentum for Change. Available at: http://unfccc.int/secretariat/momentum_for_change/items/6214.php
- UNFCCC (2017e) Momentum for Change: Lighthouse Activities. Available at: <http://momentum.unfccc.int/>
- UNFCCC (2017f) Portal on cooperative initiatives. Available at: <http://unfccc.int/focus/mitigation/items/7785.php#feedback>
- UNFCCC (2017g) The Secretariat: Who we are. Available at: <http://unfccc.int/secretariat/items/1629.php>
- United Nations (2015) Lima to Paris Action Agenda driving climate action forward. Available at: <http://www.un.org/climatechange/blog/2015/06/lima-paris-action-agenda-driving-climate-action-forward/>
- Van Asselt H and Zelli F (2014) Connect the dots: Managing the fragmentation of global climate governance. *Environmental Economics and Policy Studies* 16: 137–155.
- Van der Lugt C and Dingwerth K (2015) Governing where focality is low: UNEP and the principles for responsible investment. In: Abbott KW, Genschel P, Snidal D, et al. (eds) *International Organizations as Orchestrators*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 237–261.
- Widerberg O (2017) The ‘black box’ problem of orchestration: How to evaluate the performance of the Lima–Paris Action Agenda. *Environmental Politics* 26: 715–737.

Widerberg O and Pattberg P (2015) International cooperative initiatives in global climate governance: Raising the ambition level or delegitimizing the UNFCCC? *Global Policy* 6: 45–56.

Widerberg O and Van Laerhoven F (2014) Measuring the autonomous influence of an international bureaucracy: The Division for Sustainable Development. *International Environmental Agreements: Politics, Law and Economics* 14: 303–327.

Yamin F and Depledge J (2004) *The International Climate Change Regime: A Guide to Rules, Institutions and Procedures*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Thomas Hickmann is a Post-Doctoral Researcher and Lecturer at the University of Potsdam, Germany. His research focuses on public and private institutions in global sustainability governance.

Oscar Widerberg is an Assistant Professor at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, The Netherlands. His research focuses on the connections between state and non-state actors in environmental policymaking.

Markus Lederer is a Professor of International Relations at the Technical University of Darmstadt, Germany. His research focuses on current challenges in global climate and development politics.

Philipp Pattberg is a Professor of Transnational Environmental Governance at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, The Netherlands. His research focuses on institutional complexity, functional overlaps and fragmentation across environmental policy domains.