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Shifting narratives on funding mitigation abroad: Insights from an international dialogue

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Disclaimer

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Abstract

Boosting climate mitigation funding from advanced economies (AEs) to emerging markets and developing economies is critical to achieving the temperature goal of the Paris Agreement. Understanding the narratives that drive public opinion and influence decision-making on funding mitigation abroad can help inform the design and communication of carbon market and climate finance policies that unlock more effective international climate cooperation. At an international dialogue convened in September 2025, experts from 14 AEs explored prominent public narratives on funding mitigation abroad and opportunities to shift those narratives for better outcomes. Core narrative themes related to the generation of benefits for both funders and hosts, the management of climate target risks, the integrity of funded mitigation, and national interests. To encourage public support, participants suggested reframing funding mitigation abroad in terms of partnering with others to tackle a global, collective issue; creating new market opportunities benefiting funders; investing in global and regional stability; reinforcing broader national objectives and processes; enhancing global mitigation effort; and finding the political middle ground. Participants recommended appealing to universal principles, values, and emotions. To build public trust in funding mitigation abroad, participants emphasised the importance of ensuring high-integrity carbon market and climate finance approaches, encouraging country-specific narratives from credible voices, and enabling more public participation and transparency in government decision-making processes. These insights highlight the need for deeper and more systematic research across diverse AEs to understand and transform public narratives on funding mitigation abroad.

JEL codes

Q54, Q56, Q58

Keywords

Climate change mitigation, emissions trading, carbon markets, climate finance, international cooperation, Paris Agreement, Article 6, narratives

Summary haiku

The stories we tell
About helping each other
Drive climate action

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1 Introduction

1.1 The urgent need for international climate cooperation

The need for cooperation across countries to accelerate global climate action has never been greater. The world is not on course to achieve the global temperature goal under the Paris Agreement. Current policies are projected to deliver a temperature rise of 2.8°C above pre-industrial levels (United Nations Environment Programme, 2025). Without a dramatic change in climate action, the global carbon budget consistent with limiting temperature rises below 1.5°C is likely to be exhausted within the next four years (Reisinger et al., 2025). Urgent action is needed globally to both minimise and compensate for overshoot.

Emerging markets and developing economies (EMDEs) hold three-quarters of the cost-effective mitigation needed by 2030 under 1.5°C pathways, but they largely lack the resources to make it happen (Keramidas et al., 2021). If spending on climate action was allocated efficiently across countries, current climate ambition could be doubled with no cost increase (Piris-Cabezas et al., 2023). This means more global mitigation could occur for a given cost if advanced economies (AEs) funded mitigation activities in EMDEs.

There is a resounding consensus that funds for emissions mitigation in EMDEs are insufficient. The Climate Policy Initiative (2025a) compares regions' mitigation finance[1] needs to the actual investment flows in 2023. As examples, mitigation finance in Sub-Saharan Africa and Central Asia-Eastern Europe would need to increase by factors of 9.4 and 8.7, respectively, to meet estimated mitigation needs.

The Paris Agreement enables countries to cooperate in diverse ways to help meet their commitments, reflecting "equity and the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, in the light of different national circumstances" (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, 2015). Article 6 of the Paris Agreement enables funding transfers from one country in return for mitigation transfers (or recognition of mitigation contributions) from the receiving country. Mitigation transfers can be used to help meet the funder's mitigation target – called a Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC). The so-called carbon market approaches under Articles 6.2 and 6.4 can be characterised as payments for services. Conventional climate finance most commonly takes the form of grants, concessional loans, or debt relief.

[1] The Climate Policy Initiative's working definition of mitigation finance is "resources directed to activities either: contributing to reducing or avoiding GHG emissions, including gases regulated by the Montreal Protocol; or maintaining or enhancing GHG sinks and reservoirs" (Climate Policy Initiative, 2025b).

Many AEs and international organisations currently put extensive effort into capacity building in EMDEs to enable the transfer and utilisation of international mitigation funding. However, effort is also needed to understand and address barriers in AEs to supplying mitigation funding to EMDEs. In some AEs, public resistance to transferring large-scale climate funding to EMDEs appears to be a substantial barrier to progress; this is particularly evident in the case of increasing nationalist opposition (Bayer & Genovese, 2025; Dabla-Norris et al., 2023; Hackenesch et al., 2022; Ledger & Klöck, 2023; Leining et al., 2024.)

Without enduring and stable public support, governments in AEs will be unable to mobilise public funding for mitigation abroad with sufficient speed and scale to achieve a global emissions reduction path consistent with the Paris Agreement. Given the increasingly politicised context of climate policies (Marquardt & Lederer, 2022; Swyngedouw, 2022), there is a pressing need to understand the perceptions in AEs that affect public mitigation funding for EMDEs with greater depth and granularity.

1.2 Seeking insights through expert dialogue

In September 2025, a project team from Motu Economic and Public Policy Research (Aotearoa New Zealand), European University Institute (Italy), and the University of Zürich (Switzerland) convened a Funding Mitigation Abroad (FMA) Dialogue to help refine a research agenda on the public narratives driving international climate cooperation. The FMA Dialogue was funded by the Environmental Defense Fund through the RESET Network.

Across two meetings, the FMA Dialogue brought together 27 researchers, policy experts, and carbon market practitioners (in addition to project team members) from 14 AEs for an exchange of views about:

1. which public narratives in AEs are shaping support for – or opposition to – funding mitigation abroad
2. how to shift public narratives in favour of more ambitious climate cooperation
3. how to design future research on these issues through surveys, interviews, and experiments.

Discussions were held under the spirit of the Chatham House Rule,[2] and participants engaged in their individual capacity, not as organisational representatives. The project team proposed the following parameters for the discussions:

[2] "When a meeting, or part thereof, is held under the Chatham House Rule, participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed" (Chatham House, n.d.).

1. *Focus on funding mitigation, not adaptation, in other countries*. While extremely important, adaptation funding has very different characteristics and presents different challenges compared to mitigation funding.
2. *Focus on public funding used to help achieve government targets for mitigation or climate finance*. This includes taxpayer and other public revenue as well as private funding driven by government policy for the public good. This excludes consideration of private funding invested for commercial returns or to achieve non-government climate targets such as voluntary corporate commitments.
3. *Focus on the carbon market approaches under Article 6 of the Paris Agreement as well as conventional climate finance in the form of grants, concessional finance, or debt relief*. This can be operationalised through bilateral or multilateral agreements. This excludes the use of voluntary carbon market (VCM) mechanisms outside the Paris Agreement.
4. *Focus on narratives in AEs*. While acknowledging there would also be value in researching public perceptions of these issues in EMDEs, the project team chose to focus this phase of research on diverse AEs.

1.3 Purpose of this paper

This paper provides a synthesis of key observations, insights, and research questions that emerged from the FMA Dialogue. It should not be interpreted to reflect the views of, or any consensus among, the participants or project team. It also does not provide an objective or comprehensive representation of public opinion in AEs; that is a subject for further work. However, this paper does highlight issues for consideration by both researchers and decision-makers seeking durable solutions to the climate crisis which are grounded in international cooperation.

In section 2, we discuss the role of narratives in influencing policy outcomes. Section 3 provides findings from a brief review of previous studies. The next three sections highlight insights that emerged from the Dialogue. Section 4 focuses on how the global context is shaping public narratives on funding mitigation abroad, and section 5 on which public narratives on funding mitigation abroad are prominent in AEs. Section 6 explores where the opportunities lie to shift public narratives towards funding mitigation abroad. Section 7 presents recommendations for future research. Throughout this paper, quotes from Dialogue participants are presented in text boxes.

2 Why focus research on narratives?

A narrative can be described as "a vehicle through which the problem is described, the consequences are outlined, and solutions are generated" (Kulaeva, 2024, p.378). Narratives are often expressed as a series of events leading to an action or way of making progress that helps us understand a situation (Gulrajani, 2022; Kumar et al., 2025; Luederitz et al., 2023).

Narratives are distinct from other conceptual frameworks such as theories, discourses, communications, and frames. They are influenced by a wide variety of factors, including emotions, norms, perceived costs, values, power relations, and the storyteller's perspective. These factors interact to influence public perceptions and decision-making processes. As Turner (2025) notes, narratives provide a holistic picture of a sequence of events.

Kulaeva (2024) explains that narratives do not work in isolation and are social, related to the places they occur. How narratives emerge and evolve over time is driven by many interacting factors. For example, as information, discourses, and norms change, so do perceptions and understandings of a topic, influencing how narratives are told. Narratives emerge from distinct political-economic contexts, and both macro- and micro-level contexts matter.

Extensive work shows the connection between narratives, public opinion, and policy outcomes (e.g. Dryzek, 1997; Hajer, 1995; Roe, 1994). Gulrajani (2022) explains that narratives are "heuristic devices that frame how causal relationships can be understood, which is then the basis for taking certain kinds of policy choices forward" (p.6). Further work shows that public opinion influences the direction and durability of policy outcomes (e.g. Basseches et al., 2022; Bechtel & Scheve, 2013; Choi et al., 2024).

3 Findings from previous studies

Despite recognition that funding transfers from Global North to Global South are essential to closing the mitigation finance gap, public perception of this redistribution is still emerging in the literature. There are reports and scholarly work on channelling aid and grants from developed to developing countries, but these only briefly touch on crucial questions about the political economic context of donor countries and the geopolitics of climate governance (Gaikwad et al., 2025). Similarly limited are in-depth discussions about how the end goal of transfers (e.g. meeting NDCs, poverty alleviation, and/or specific mitigation activities) and form of transfer (e.g. carbon markets, loans, and/or grants) influence perceptions and policy preferences. Most studies also focus on opinions, not narratives or discourses. The discussion

below highlights three sources that offer a useful foundation for future work: Baranzini et al. (2018), Bruckmann (2025), and Gaikwad et al. (2025).

The research of Baranzini et al. (2018) examined whether emphasising cost-effectiveness, institutional reliability, or co-benefits influences public willingness to fund domestic versus international reforestation projects. Using a single United States-based lab experiment (N = 300), the findings revealed that stressing the cost-effectiveness of internationally based reforestation significantly increased its support, suggesting that economic arguments for purchasing offsets abroad are often unknown or overlooked by the public. Information on programme reliability and local ancillary domestic benefits had less impact. These results point to how a trade-off occurs once costs are weighed against other considerations such as co-benefits.

The study by Bruckmann (2025) on the purchase of internationally transferred mitigation outcomes to meet Switzerland's NDC is particularly relevant. Based on a national survey of Swiss opinion (N = 4915), his research examined the level of support for climate policies that reduce emissions abroad to meet domestic targets. Respondents were asked about their support for various policy options, including domestic emission reductions and international cooperation. Findings revealed that only 18% of Swiss respondents supported reducing emissions abroad to achieve domestic climate targets, indicating a significant preference for domestic action. This level of support was notably lower compared to other climate policy measures. So, while Switzerland is actively engaged in international climate cooperation via Article 6.2, public backing for such policies remains limited according to the study.

Gaikwad et al. (2025) looked at the design of climate transfer programmes to ask whether emphasising compensation, choosing mitigation over adaptation, and involving donor-recipient partnerships influenced public support in both donor and recipient countries. To investigate, the authors conducted paired survey experiments in the United States (N = 4000) and India (N = 4000), randomly varying three features: (1) framing transfers as compensatory, (2) support for mitigation versus adaptation goals, and (3) whether implementation was led by donor, recipient, or joint partners. Results showed support for cross-border climate transfers increased when policies addressed vulnerability and prioritised mitigation, and when partnerships included both donor and recipient agents. These features generate both justice and material appeals, boosting backing across voter coalitions. Overall, these factors mattered more than cost-efficiency arguments.

Across the extant literature, there are divergences and similarities in conclusions. Divergence occurred on cost-effectiveness. A few noted that the cost-effectiveness of internationally based programmes significantly increased support (Baranzini et al., 2018).

However, most noted the strong preference for domestic mitigation even if international activities were more cost-effective (Bruckmann, 2025; Buntaine & Prather, 2018). Broadly, three common findings were shared about public preferences on transferring funds for international mitigation:

1. *Home bias based on co-benefits*. When co-benefits shifted abroad, support dropped (Abildtrup et al., 2024; Bruckmann, 2025; Buntaine & Prather, 2018).
2. *Climate justice and compensation rather than solidarity.* Messages about helping "the vulnerable" resonated more than shared, global responsibility (Charnysh et al., 2024; Gampfer et al., 2014; Kumar et al., 2025).
3. *Effectiveness and transparency with close partners*. Public support increased when the activities funded could demonstrate effective reductions, were enforced, and involved established partners in the design. Risk reduction matters (Bechtel & Scheve, 2013; Gaikwad et al., 2025; Kumar et al., 2025).

Research on narratives addressing other relevant topics can offer useful insights for this project. For example, a growing body of research has investigated public perceptions of domestic climate measures, showing that climate policies are more acceptable when they involve participatory processes, ensure fair distribution of costs and revenues, and yield co-benefits such as improved public health (Dugstad et al., 2024; Fabre et al., 2025; Jakob, 2018; Maestre-Andrés et al., 2019). However, the challenge with global climate change mitigation projects is that implementation and co-benefits occur in "foreign" countries and are less visible in the funding country. Evidence suggests that other factors – applicable to international measures – also play a role, such as perceived effectiveness, trust, and how individuals feel informed or represented in decision-making forums (Drews & Van den Bergh, 2016; Lahsen, 2016; Leiserowitz et al., 2013). As such, public information and narratives become especially critical for generating support for climate investments beyond national borders.

The role of narratives and framing for the acceptability of international policies is reflected in the literature on development aid, which highlights how moral reasoning, trust, and ideology affect public attitudes, with trust in international institutions and the perceived relevance of aid being key determinants of support (Macdonald, 2025; Paxton & Knack, 2012; Prather, 2024). Public international climate finance is similar in this regard, as it blends mitigation objectives with development outcomes and thus occupies a space between foreign aid and climate action. However, such funding differs from traditional development aid in a key aspect: the climate benefits of emissions reductions are global and location-independent, so investing in mitigation in lower-cost contexts abroad can yield direct economic advantages for funding countries. This

aspect is directly harnessed through international carbon markets. Since public awareness of this cost-effectiveness is low, political resistance risks being fuelled by narratives focused on domestic priorities or scepticism about international cooperation.

Some research has examined the effectiveness and impact of public international climate finance (Lee et al., 2022; Steckel et al., 2016) as well as of international carbon markets (Michaelowa et al., 2019). Other researchers have analysed the barriers to mobilising domestic and international mitigation finance, such as those linked to the financial system (Monasterolo, 2020), governance (Bracking & Leffel, 2021; Lövbrand et al., 2009), and challenges faced by EMDEs (Jakob et al., 2014).

4 Dialogue insights on the role of global context in shaping FMA narratives

Dialogue participants commented extensively on the strong political and economic headwinds facing international climate cooperation. A key contributor identified by multiple participants is the movement in many countries towards nationalism, isolationism, and protectionism in foreign and economic policy, with spillover effects for climate policy. Some participants identified difficult economic conditions in their country as a barrier to funding mitigation abroad. Other factors highlighted by participants included public mistrust of government and multilateral institutions, transparency and equity barriers to solving problems of the global commons, and policy inconsistency both within and across government administrations.

Dialogue participants discussed contextual challenges specific to global progress on climate change mitigation. Some pointed to shortfalls in global action to deliver ambitious mitigation, raising questions about whether countries are still committed in fact and not just in principle to achieving the global temperature goal of the Paris Agreement. Some noted ongoing resistance to mitigation progress from stakeholders with vested interests in maintaining the status quo, and from governments that are choosing to weaken mitigation policies or actively support high-emission economic growth. Other challenges identified by participants included variable public awareness and understanding of carbon market and climate finance approaches under the Paris Agreement, and public scepticism about their effectiveness in supporting global and national mitigation goals. The box below presents a comment from a Dialogue participant.

> *Criticism arises, and then there's a lack of trust. And that leads to misunderstanding among the general public, parliamentarians, politicians, which actually creates a lot of confusion in the debate, which makes it really hard to actually advance a constructive narrative on how to use carbon.*

Dialogue participants also discussed global contextual factors that can encourage international climate cooperation. Key examples included the deepening impacts of climate change and increasing perceptions of national and personal vulnerability, the growing technical and institutional capacities for EMDEs to participate in carbon market and climate finance mechanisms, the falling costs of mitigation technologies in key sectors, and growing interest in mitigation activities from businesses and investors.

5 Dialogue insights on prominent FMA narratives in AEs

Across diverse AEs, Dialogue participants identified a set of four core narrative themes that are often observed in public discourse on funding mitigation abroad. These include the generation of benefits for both funders and hosts, the management of climate target risks, the integrity of funded mitigation, and national interests. Across these themes, Dialogue participants have observed narratives both supporting and opposing funding mitigation abroad.

5.1 The generation of benefits for both funders and hosts

According to Dialogue participants, a prominent opposing narrative across countries is that public funding for mitigation should be spent at home in ways that benefit local taxpayers and businesses. Two key public concerns observed by Dialogue participants are: (1) losing the local economic and environmental benefits that would otherwise be generated from domestic mitigation investment, and (2) slowing or displacing progress with domestic mitigation as a result of funding mitigation abroad. These concerns appear to apply across both carbon market and climate finance approaches. Below are quotes from three Dialogue participants.

The dominant narrative that I think is that international mitigation displaces domestic action, and that domestic action is perceived, very often as bringing higher value for the domestic economy and for citizens domestically. So there's a strong focus on investing taxpayers' money at home and this is a long and deeply seated narrative in some regions.

Directing investment offshore rather than onshore and domestically is often seen more as a cost than as an investment.

The left wing, they are against Article 6, but pro-climate finance. They see Article 6 as delaying domestic action.

Three supporting narratives discussed in the Dialogue are that funding mitigation abroad benefits the funding countries by: (1) creating new market opportunities for businesses in the funding countries, (2) accelerating global climate mitigation and sustainable development, and (3) strengthening international relations. While these could be characterised broadly as public-good benefits for funding countries, such benefits appear relatively indirect compared to more tangible outcomes for the funders' citizens from domestic mitigation investment. The Dialogue discussion suggests that supporting narratives about indirect benefits to funders from funding mitigation abroad are less compelling to the public in the funding countries, especially in times of domestic economic downturn. Understanding public perceptions of direct versus indirect benefits for their own country from funding mitigation abroad is an important topic for further research.

5.2 Management of climate target risks

A prominent supporting narrative observed by Dialogue participants across countries is that funding mitigation abroad through carbon market approaches helps lower the cost and compliance risks of achieving the funder's NDC under the Paris Agreement.[3] Participants reported that in some AEs supporting carbon market approaches, the prospect of lower domestic mitigation costs and less stringent domestic mitigation pathways has garnered enough public and political support to proceed with implementation. Participants have observed that even AEs which are fully committed to ambitious domestic climate action can choose to use carbon market approaches as a safeguard in case domestic policies fall short of expectations.

[3] As discussed above, Article 6 enables a country to bridge an NDC gap by funding mitigation in another country provided the transferred mitigation meets requirements.

> *The positive ones [narratives] on the carbon markets are that it's cheaper. We see this from mainly the right wing, but also from business.*

Dialogue participants debated whether the option to use carbon market approaches has enhanced global mitigation ambition. Some considered that having the flexibility to fund mitigation abroad has enabled countries to take on more ambitious and equitable NDCs. A counterargument was that this increased ambition had not actually materialised, given inadequate NDC ambition in AEs and relatively low participation by AEs in carbon market approaches under the Paris Agreement to date.

One observation from the Dialogue was that the flexibility offered by carbon market approaches has also seeded public narratives opposing their use. A key narrative identified here is that the flexibility under Article 6 enables wealthier countries and high-emitting industries to avoid taking disruptive climate action and transforming their own production. This can lead to the public perceiving carbon market approaches as producing inequitable outcomes and undermining the spirit of the Paris Agreement.

Another opposing public narrative identified by Dialogue participants is that relying on carbon market approaches can expose funding countries to greater risks of NDC non-compliance. Host countries can fail to deliver the contracted mitigation due to technical, political, or economic factors. Future AE governments can change or abandon commitments to funding mitigation abroad which were made by previous administrations.

Given the range of target-related risk factors, one suggestion from a Dialogue participant was that AE governments looking to fund mitigation abroad should opt more for climate finance rather than carbon market approaches (see the box below). However, others countered that high-integrity carbon market approaches bring the added benefits of helping achieve climate targets which governments have already committed to meet, delivering transparent and quantified outcomes in the form of transferred mitigation, and mobilising private-sector participation. It was observed that in times of fiscal austerity, both carbon market and climate finance approaches face challenges from competing demands on limited funds.

> *We have this other path of conventional climate finance. This is about Article 9 of the Paris Agreement…If the trend in funding mitigation abroad really goes solely to Article 6, we need to ask ourselves: "Why is Article 6 preferred to conventional climate finance?"… Because if you're doing Article 6 in a good way – meaning increasing ambition, not just going for low-hanging fruits, but actually transforming projects – you will need to spend public money anyway. So why are you then focusing on Article 6 and not on conventional climate finance?*

5.3 The integrity of funded mitigation

It was clear from Dialogue participants that public scepticism about the environmental and social integrity of funding mitigation abroad has seeded opposing public narratives in many countries. This scepticism appears to be relatively stronger for carbon market approaches but can still apply to climate finance.

> *What is feeding into that as well is an eroding trust in international institutions and our capacity collectively to track the impact of international use of carbon credits or linking systems across borders. So that leads to a stronger domestic focus.*

Dialogue participants discussed how previous deficiencies in the Kyoto Protocol's carbon market mechanisms,[4] the VCM, and some early project activities under Article 6 have contributed to common public narratives that funding mitigation abroad does not deliver real benefits for the climate or sustainable development, or safeguard the rights of local communities and Indigenous peoples.

Participants discussed public concerns about conventional climate finance, such as that the money will not be used effectively for mitigation due to bureaucratic inefficiency or corruption, the mitigation outcomes will be uncertain, or the money will come with additional political or economic obligations ("strings attached") from the funding country.

Participants noted that multiple international initiatives are working to support the integrity of carbon market activities under the Paris Agreement and the VCM,[5] and rulemaking

[4] These include Joint Implementation and the Clean Development Mechanism.
[5] Examples include UNDP's High-Integrity Carbon Markets Initiative, the Coalition for Paris-Aligned and High Integrity Use of Carbon Credits, the Voluntary Carbon Markets Integrity Initiative, and the Integrity Council for the Voluntary Carbon Market.

under Article 6 has sought to improve upon past experiences. Despite these efforts, participants suggested that overcoming entrenched public scepticism of funding mitigation abroad will be a challenging goal.

5.4 National interests

Across the range of public narratives discussed by Dialogue participants, the issue of national interests was consistently raised. Whether driven by public concerns about mitigation ambition and integrity, environmental and social co-benefits, cost-effectiveness, equity, competitiveness, risk management, or international and trade relations, prominent public narratives about funding mitigation abroad appear to rely on making the case for what serves the best interests of the polity. The experience of Dialogue participants suggests that appeals to altruism, historical responsibility, or capacity to pay have not been proven by themselves to mobilise large-scale outlays of public funding for mitigation abroad.

Dialogue participants discussed how national context shapes perceptions of national interest. One suggestion was that AEs with more surplus wealth may be more likely to fund mitigation abroad than those struggling to meet the needs of their own citizens. Another was that AEs may be more willing to fund mitigation abroad in host countries with which they share close cultural, economic, or political ties.

Even AEs with similar characteristics may respond differently to a given set of options given their perceptions of fairness. For example, Dialogue participants have observed that some small countries are opting not to fund mitigation abroad because they consider their efforts are too small to make a difference or they will be disadvantaged compared to larger countries that are not participating. Conversely, other small countries are funding mitigation abroad to access more diverse and lower-cost mitigation options than are available within the limits of their own economy, or to demonstrate support for collective action. Some AEs are funding mitigation abroad to create new market opportunities for exports of green technology and services or to strengthen trade relations. Conversely, others appear to view it as funding trade competitors to boost their performance, disadvantaging their own producers.

> *In small countries we are seeing, you know, "We've already done our part. It's others' turn to do their part. We don't need to do anything. We don't need to do anything domestically, and we don't need to do anything internationally, because we're not the problem. And don't you dare shame me for the problem. Look at China, look at the US, you know, look at somewhere else." And that is very much what comes out of a narrative that comes from the shame and the responsibility and guilt.*

Participants noted how perceptions of national interest can be shaped and exploited by the politics of left versus right, or everyday people versus elites. Some have seen political polarisation stifle constructive debate and hinder long-term policy commitment regarding funding mitigation abroad. A key question was how to find common ground for international climate cooperation across political divides.

6 Dialogue insights on opportunities to shift FMA narratives

To encourage public support for funding mitigation abroad, Dialogue participants suggested reframing the purpose of funding mitigation abroad; appealing to universal principles, values, and emotions; and building public trust in funding mitigation abroad. Each of these is discussed below.

6.1 Reframing the purpose of funding mitigation abroad

Participants observed that to date, funding mitigation abroad has been framed in many AEs as upholding international commitments for mitigation targets and climate finance, bridging domestic target gaps cost-effectively, or providing a form of development aid. They suggested reframing the purpose of funding mitigation abroad to address the underlying public concerns that currently drive opposing narratives. Examples included framing funding mitigation abroad as:

1. *Partnering with other countries to tackle climate change as a global, collective issue*. Every country is a climate taker, making global mitigation an act of national as well as collective self-preservation. The frame of partnering for mutual benefit is very different from that providing development aid through a lens of donor versus recipient.

2. *Creating new market opportunities for the funder's businesses and investors*. Funding governments could design mitigation partnership agreements that mobilise their own businesses and investors to help accelerate the host's low-emission transition.
3. *Investing in global and regional stability*. Funding mitigation abroad lowers the risks to host countries from severe climate impacts and generates important benefits for sustainable development. These benefits contribute to geopolitical and economic stability, thereby supporting security and trade and lowering pressure for migration.
4. *Reinforcing broader geopolitical relationships and processes.* Strategic linkages can be made between funding mitigation abroad and strengthening multilateral agreements, enhancing bilateral or regional cooperation and trade agreements, building public/private partnerships, and managing sovereign wealth funds.
5. *Managing national and global climate target risks.* Funding mitigation abroad can enable funding countries to contribute more to global mitigation than is economically or technically feasible at home, thereby accelerating global mitigation progress. It can also provide a safeguard against failing to achieve committed NDCs. The shift from an either/or frame to a both/and frame for reducing domestic emissions and funding mitigation abroad is essential to bridging the climate finance gap facing EMDEs.
6. *Finding a political middle ground on mitigation ambition and economic development.* Using carbon market approaches to provide flexibility and create new market opportunities may appeal to right-leaning interests, while using them to boost global mitigation progress and equity by mobilising greater mitigation funding flows for EMDEs may appeal to left-leaning interests.

> *The urgency of climate action generally needs to be on top of the agenda as well. And of collaborating on climate action internationally. But also emphasise more the positive aspects. So, emphasise the co-benefits in recipient countries, and especially the sustainable development aspects, which are in the public discussion, not that often linked to carbon markets.*
>
> *Someone mentioned public-private partnerships. The idea of creating mutual opportunities for countries working together to solve similar problems. To me, that's something that could have traction, and we seem to have lost that. And that's a very different model from a climate finance model, which is more like we give you a donation, and you can do what you want.*

> *But on the more positive note, if it's possible, link some of the climate narratives to what are the concerns, for instance, on the far right. Could it be that mitigation abroad will reduce migration?*

6.2 Appealing to universal principles, values, and emotions

Dialogue participants suggested that appealing to principles such as solidarity, partnership, cooperation, shared gain, innovation, and resilience could be more effective than responsibility, obligation, charity, sacrifice, compensation, or reparation. Appeals to emotions such as hope, belonging, and integrity could be more motivational than guilt or shame. Shifting narratives from least-cost towards highest-value mitigation could encourage more emphasis on valuing co-benefits for both funders and hosts. Examining the resonance of funding mitigation abroad with both liberal and conservative values in the political sphere could help with finding common ground for agreement on policy direction.

6.3 Building public trust in funding mitigation abroad

It was clear from the discussions that public support for funding mitigation abroad will prove impossible if the approaches lack environmental and social integrity. Governments must give the public confidence that funding from AEs – whether through carbon market or climate finance approaches – will produce real benefits for climate action and sustainable development. Dialogue participants suggested this will require:

1. implementation of high-quality mitigation activities
2. consultation and consent involving affected communities
3. stringent standards for monitoring, reporting, and verification
4. transparency, including sharing evidence-based stories about what has been accomplished and how deficiencies have been corrected.

Participants also discussed the importance of encouraging country-specific narratives from credible voices. To date, many of the narratives on funding mitigation abroad have been shaped at an international level by technocratic negotiators and policy specialists, international organisations, businesses, and political interests. Participants suggested that shifting the focus towards country-specific storytelling can be used to engage more emotional drivers of narratives. Shifting the focus towards people, communities, and outcomes may resonate more strongly than describing impersonal transfers of money and mitigation. Using credible storytellers, such as scientific climate committees, can offer a counterweight to politically driven narratives.

> *Who drives the narrative? Politicians drive it in their political messages, and that's being picked up by others, and notably the media.*
>
> *The narratives are very shaped by technocratic views. And that's because the average citizens, the public, are not very knowledgeable about this. It would be hard to shift narratives.*

During the discussion, a participant suggested changing how decisions are made on funding mitigation abroad. Encouraging more participatory democracy (e.g. citizens' assemblies and deliberative processes) could help with shifting public opinion, improving perceptions of transparency and integrity, and increasing trust. This could also help with enabling the voices of those supporting change to be heard alongside the voices of those with vested interests in the status quo.

7 Conclusion

The FMA Dialogue brought together 27 experts from 14 AEs to help shape a longer-term research agenda on how public narratives are influencing decision-making on FMA and where the opportunities lie to shift those narratives in favour of greater international climate

cooperation. A range of supporting and opposing narratives were identified around four core themes: the generation of benefits for both funders and hosts, the management of climate target risks, the integrity of funded mitigation, and national interests. To encourage public support for FMA, participants recommended reframing the benefits to both funders and hosts; appealing to universal principles, values, and emotions; and building public trust in the integrity and effectiveness of both carbon market and climate finance approaches.

What was shared is not definitive evidence. Instead, the discussions highlight the need for further social science research on issues such as:

1. which public narratives on funding mitigation abroad are dominant in different contexts, and why
2. perceptions of different funding sources, channels, uses, and benefits
3. underlying principles, values, and norms
4. who holds the power to create and use narratives
5. practical ways to shift narratives in favour of international cooperation.

How public narratives on funding mitigation abroad are developed and applied today will have implications for international climate cooperation over decades to come. Public narratives based on outdated, incomplete, or incorrect information can be improved, while public narratives that reveal policy deficiencies can create opportunities for transformational change. To be effective, both current and future mechanisms for international climate cooperation must accelerate global mitigation progress with environmental and social integrity, contribute to sustainable development, and facilitate partnerships that benefit both hosts and funders.

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