

## **Combatting Climate Change in Latin America as an Active CSR Project: A Global Compact Approach**

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**Abstract:** There is no doubt that one of the most important challenges facing humankind is caring for our resources and the environment given that there would be no talk of life or the future without the spatial and physical conditions in which they inevitably take place. Climate change is a topic that has been examined from multiple perspectives, proof of it being a complex situation in which various agents could be called upon to intervene. In spite of it being a matter often attributed to nations, the private sector has now taken a fundamental role. Therefore, the objective of this study is to analyze the contributions of Latin American organizations in combatting climate change, reflecting upon whether said contributions truly act towards fulfilling international commitments actively and effectively.

**Key words:** Sustainability, SDG, UN, environment, global warming, whether, truly, towards

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### **INTRODUCTION**

One of the major challenges that humankind is facing is climate change. In spite of the uncertainty in many regards, there is scientific evidence that human activity is directly or indirectly causing a climate change of dangerous dimensions, provoking consequences such as floods, draughts, hurricanes and intense storms, among others that will especially affect developing countries. Climate change is a threat to development and a challenge to the sustainable development objectives of the United Nations Organization (UN) (ONU, 2015). One of these objectives is No. 13, titled “Accion por el Clima” (“climate action”) whose aim is to orchestrate adaptation, mitigation and financing to confront the phenomenon in accordance with the negotiation guidelines established by the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) (CMNUCC, 2007).

The thrust of this objective is to strengthen countries’ resilience, support the most vulnerable nations such as island states, mobilize financing that capacitates such nations and ensure that all countries adopt strategical and political measures to deal with climate change and in turn, it looks to improve individual and

institutional capacities regarding mitigation and adaptation to climate change and its effects (ONU, 2015).

However, climate change is not an issue solely involving governments. During the World Economic Forum in Davos, the United Nations (UN) Ex-Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon addressed private sector leaders, stressing the need for an international commitment to building a more equal and respectful world in terms of the environment and human rights. He pointed out the need for more effective ties between government and private enterprise that promote corporate adoption of sustainable and socially responsible policies with the ultimate aim of global progress and SDG fulfillment (Ki-Moon, 2016).

This study will examine the Latin American private sector’s contributions in reference to climate change through CSR projects, reflecting upon whether their endeavors are truly active and effectively cooperate with their nation’s international commitments. The result reports presented by Global Compact member organizations will serve as a point of analysis with special emphasis on sections pertaining to environmental responsibility.

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## CLIMATE CHANGE, AN INTERNATIONAL RESPONSIBILITY

The concept of climate change as defined by the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) (CMNUCC, 2007) is a modification in climate directly or indirectly attributed to human activity, resulting in an alteration in the composition of the global atmosphere in addition to natural climate variability. This conceptualization circumvents the debate regarding the existence of an anthropogenic footprint as part of the problem, focusing on the reality of the problem's existence, the magnitude of the implied challenge and the need to form a cooperative force between public and non-public agents to face the implications effectively.

The Stern (2007) report documents the economic impact of climate change and warns that global economic growth could be reduced by one-fifth if drastic measures are not taken due to the increase in draughts and flooding, the loss of marine resources, the decrease in food production infrastructure damage, the increase in health problems, unemployment and forced migration. Meteorological phenomena costs could rise to 1% of the global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by 2050, affecting not only trade activity and global financial markets but also communications, causing greater volatility in insurance and capital costs. Consequently, Stern urges nations to allocate 1% of the GDP to immediate, earnest and drastic measures to reduce harmful gas emissions. Given that such an action will reduce the risk of suffering dire consequences in the future, it can be considered a lucrative investment.

Due to the scope of this challenge and its global dimension, cooperation is indispensable to confront the problem effectively. The nations who understood this message of cooperation included the environment on their international agendas in the 1970's and a decade later, embraced a different concept of development. Sustainable development is rooted in the commitment to intergenerational equality, working together so that, the present economic development does not compromise possibilities of future generations being able to satisfy their needs (Stern, 2007).

Concerning climate, it was in the first World Climate Conference celebrated by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO, 2017) in Genova, Italy in 1979, drawing scientists from 185 countries in which global warming and climate change were declared threats to the international community. A series of concrete actions to protect the ecosystems that would form part of the world climate programme were defined (Carabias *et al.*, 2010). In

1988, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) was created, comprised of scientists of diverse nationalities and disciplines who serve to verify and update evidence of climate change phenomena and provide relevant information to the world community and implied decision-makers by means of assessment reports (IPCC, 2011).

In 1990 the second World Climate Conference was held. A scheme of common, yet varying responsibilities was agreed upon, alluding to the greater responsibility, hence the greater commitment of industrialized countries in comparison to that of developing countries in taking action towards mitigating the problem of climate change (Carabias *et al.*, 2010). That same year, the IPCC presented an assessment report in which it affirmed that the climate change problem was a shared responsibility among industrialized and developing countries. It pointed out specific responsibilities held by industrialized countries in adopting mitigation measures and providing economic and technological resources to developing countries. The fruits of labor of the IPCC paved the way for founding the UN framework convention on climate change, the highest authority on climate change whose relevance lies in its being constituted in negotiations between countries in the North and South, these being able to establish consensual mitigation measures.

The convention's objective is to stabilize the concentration of GHG in the atmosphere to avoid variances in the climate system due to human activity (Article 2) (UNFCCC, 2011). Within the UNFCCC structure, the fundamental part is the Conference of the Parties (COP) which is considered the highest authority in decision-making. The COP annually meets for two weeks to assess the climate change situation as well as the effectiveness of its agreements. In addition, it is in charge of examining the activities executed by its member states over the last year an inventory of generated emissions is studied. Furthermore, the conference of the parties incorporates new scientific studies in its effort to fight climate change (Anonymous, 1992).

The framework convention has fomented intergovernmental connections through the admittance of observation groups that participate in the conference of the parties, despite their not being decision-making entities. The convention has authorized approximately 86 intergovernmental observation entities among which are the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Environment Programme, the World Meteorological Organization, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the International Atomic Energy Agency and the

Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries. Non-governmental organizations are also observers in the conferences of the parties. They represent economic interest groups, environmental groups, local governments, academic and research institutions, religious entities, labor organizations as well as indigenous population groups (Anonymous, 1992).

In 2015, a historic agreement was signed in the framework of the 21st Conference of the Parties held in Paris: it was the first binding global environmental agreement. Also called the Paris Agreement and signed by 195 countries, it announced the commitment to take action to prevent surpassing the global temperature increase of 1.5°C in an effort to diminish the risks of climate change (UNFCCC, 2011). Regarding adaptation and financing, it pronounced the strengthening of communities' capacities to confront climate change more effectively and called for international aid in support of developing countries. In addition in continuation with the work of previous decades, it recognized the relevant role played by different actors in the international system in the fight against climate change: subnational governments, civil society and above all, the private sector (UNFCCC, 2011).

### **CLIMATE CHANGE AS A CORNERSTONE IN THE GLOBAL COMPACT**

During the period 2000-2015, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) structured what would be the international roadmap for the next 15 years, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). SDGs are the challenges to face until 2030 with the aim of achieving a more just and sustainable world for all inhabitants, reducing inequality and promoting more dignified living conditions (Bustos and Chacon, 2009). These objectives are the result of the participation of multiple economic, political and social agents from 193 countries those who represent public as well as private entities and industrial, academic and civil society organizations (ONU, 2015).

As with the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), it is expected that the sustainable development goals function as an international reference which allows human conditions in different countries to be understood and assessed, generating an international development framework (Contreras and Aguilar, 2012; Naranjo, 2015). However, unlike what took place with the MDGs (Ribera, 2015), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) seeks to involve all population sectors by means of the SDGs whose aim is the participation of all society members, complementing

the previously assigned state responsibility. This participation includes citizens, non-governmental organizations, media and most certainly industry and the private sector (Candro, 2012) who share responsibility in community development, according to Sandoval and Orgulloso (2006).

While the MDGs were being formulated, the world bank (Mundial, 2009) emphasized the importance of the private sector in nation's development in its 2009 global monitoring report. It highlighted the need for public-private alliances focusing on improving living conditions through four lines of action: poverty, health, education and climate change (Gamboa-Bernal, 2015).

According to Castellano *et al.* (2015), even though the majority of the SDG proposals represent challenges mostly faced by governments, the public sector will struggle to meet these objectives without the support of all social and economic actors given the private sector's undeniable importance. There are certain objectives to which companies can clearly contribute, for example: the creation of decent employment (SDG 8), employee's improved access to education (SDG 4) and basic services (SDG 6, 9 and 11) investment in clean energy (SDG 7), ecosystem protection (SDG 14 and 15), fight against climate change (SDG 13) and eradication of discrimination (SDG 5, 10 and 16). In general, the world bank urged the private sector to support these objectives, building and strengthening alliances (SDG 17) with the final aim of achieving a more dignified life for all world inhabitants.

This report clearly adheres to the Global Compact's intention: cooperative sustainability initiatives of international impact created within the SDG development framework (Urteaga, 2008). This Compact is a call to corporations to align their strategies and operations with human rights, labor standards, environment and anti-corruption universal principles, taking necessary action to allow the advancement of the SDGs (Anonymous, 2017; UNGC, 2015).

The companies that join the Global Compact must seek to develop business practices that adhere to the following principles (REPMNU, 2015):

- Support, respect and protection of human rights within their realm of influence
- Assurance that their activities do not contribute to the infringement upon human rights
- Support the freedom of association and effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining
- Support the eradication of any form of forced or coerced labor

- Support the abolition of child labor
- Support the eradication of discriminatory work and employment practices
- Maintain a preventive posture in favor of the environment
- Promote initiatives that foment a greater responsibility toward the environment
- Support the development and use of environment-friendly technologies
- Work against corruption in all its forms including extortion and bribery

In Latin American countries such as Mexico, the Global Compact has clearly impacted company practices in that it constitutes one of the largest networks in America and the third largest worldwide with almost 800 companies, 59% of which belong to the private sector and 41% to the public sector or civil society (UNGC, 2015).

Furthermore, the Global Compact has impacted the way companies view environment-related issues; policies are now conceived not only as company-sponsored ecological projects but also as internal day-to-day operational improvements. As Gustavo Perez, president of pacto mundial mexico (Global Compact Mexico), points out, the project strives for companies to no longer consider sustainability an expense such as in the times of philanthropic social and environmental contributions. Rather as in accordance with responsible business models, it should be seen as an investment, aiming for sustainability as medium and long-term goals (Trejo, 2015).

#### **CLIMATE CHANGE AS A CSR ELEMENT**

Accion Empresarial (2003) points out that contemporary organizations understand that the world is a growingly complex place and its lucrativeness and sustainability do not just depend on matters of trade but also on situations affected by trade. Accordingly, companies claiming to be socially responsible have managed to be aware of the “how much we are earning” and extend this concern to the “how we are earning it” while doing business (Crespo, 2010). Hence, CSR seems to have become more and more natural and necessary among companies, being that it is an excellent strategy for achieving efficiency and effectiveness (Ortiz, 2005).

Firstly, it can be observed that CSR consists of a commitment of organizations to sustainable development, focusing on four basic aspects: economic, social, employment and environmental sustainability (Restrepo,

2008). For this to be achieved, companies must adopt responsible strategic practices that have a clear relation with their business model and value chain. According to the Ethos-Iarse (2014), there are four dimensions that make up responsible attitudes in business with which all socially responsible organizations must comply. They are described as the following:

**Vision and strategy:** This dimension constitutes the foundation for defining business actions which are expected to adhere to sustainability attributes in the products and services the organization offers (Solis, 2008). This aspect includes sustainability strategies, value proposals and business models.

**Corporate governance and management:** This dimension refers to the structuring of management in line with social responsibility in business (Garcia, 2011). It is constituted by indicators such as codes of conduct, governability, accountability, loyal competition, anti-corruption practices, responsible political participation and management systems.

**Social dimension:** This aspect reflects the degree of participation a company may have in highly relevant social issues, taking into account its prevention, protection, strengthening and promotion practices (Chirinos *et al.*, 2012) such as human rights protection, good labor practices, consumer interaction and organization-community relations.

**Environmental dimension:** Over the last decades, some of the most relevant public policy issues have been those which focus on human impact on the environment. Therefore, it does not seem odd to expect that a company deem itself socially responsible, namely environmentally sustainable. This dimension comprises all organizational actions related to the fight against climate change, the management and monitoring of social impacts on ecosystem services and biodiversity as well as the impact caused by the consumption of a company’s products and services.

These dimensions allow for a much broader vision of different indicators that a socially responsible company can fulfill through its internal and external practices. CSR can provide a standard for innovation opportunities regarding a company’s impact on the environment or sustainability improvement (Leon *et al.*, 2012). Although, CSR was initially regarded as philanthropic or altruistic activities as previously mentioned, today companies seek to develop business models that generate a reciprocal value for all parties and that impact one or more of the

CSR dimensions (Wagenberg, 2006). Consequently, it is necessary to specify which actions truly correspond to active protection projects and which ones lack active assistance given that there is a difference between respecting and contributing, especially in terms of climate change.

**COMBATting CLIMATE CHANGE IN LATIN AMERICA AS AN ACTIVE CSR PROJECT**

One of the fundamental points of the Global Compact is the subject of climate change and although, this is one of the commitments that all participating organizations must consider, this does not imply that they effectively carry out actions concerning the issue. Most of the companies involved have exclusively focused on improving the environmental situation in their production Chain which relegates climate change action to being alternative environmental policy not obligatory action and certainly not a serious project that can actively alleviate the problem. Anti-pollution proposals cannot be considered in the same light as environment-improvement proposals; for this reason, this problem must be examined. To clarify this point an analysis of a sample of Global Compact Latin American companies will be carried out.

As a first point of analysis, the general spectrum of participation in the Global Compact on behalf of the Latin American private sector will be presented (Table 1). The level of commitment that this sector is contributing to matters of social and environmental impact can be observed.

It is important to take into account that not all of the organizations that signed the compact continue to participate, since only 2,604 companies hold an active status, meaning they continue to submit annual reports. In addition for a signatory's concrete actions to have been analyzed herein, it must have submitted at least one report after one year of participation. Up to August 2017, 583 companies had not complied with this time requisite, thus being excluded from the sample given that they had not submitted a report for analysis. Therefore, we were limited to considering 2,021 Global Compact signatory companies which were found to be active and had presented at least one annual report of activities and contributions (Table 2).

Based on this information, a representative sample of 10% of the reports in proportion to each of the participating countries was analyzed. Of these 202 annual activity reports, the fulfilled commitments regarding the environment were classified, considering whether they focused solely on protection and anti-pollution or additionally, on contributing to sustainability, creating an

Table 1: Latin American Global Compact signatories

Countries	Number of signatories
Argentina	415
Belize	1
Bolivia	27
Brazil	734
Chile	63
Colombia	590
Costa Rica	36
Dominican Republic	31
El Salvador	15
Ecuador	114
Guatemala	29
Honduras	2
Mexico	668
Nicaragua	39
Panama	65
Paraguay	67
Peru	118
Uruguay	32
Venezuela	12
Total	3,058

UN-Global Compact (Anonymous, 2016)

Table 2: Classification of environment-oriented actions in Latin American companies

Variables	Values
Include environment-oriented actions	202
Propose protection and anti-pollution actions	202
Include active projects that contribute to sustainability and climate change	830

Anonymous (2016)

environmentally conscious culture and combatting climate change. Based on the analyzed reports, the results were as follows: of the 202 reports analyzed, all of them pose policies or actions to prevent pollution, protect the environment or simply reduce the carbon footprint during production processes. This complies with the national and international norms that all companies should respect in addition to the international commitments of decreasing pollution contributing to climate change.

Unfortunately, only 83 of the 202 organizations propose active projects that contribute to improving the environment and raising community ecological awareness in addition to environment protection and care; taking the focus beyond an anti-destruction, extraction and impact approach to a contributing, promoting and developing a sustainable and environmentally-friendly focus. Some examples of these actions are the following.

The Uruguayan company Antel has incorporated obsolete material and waste management processes in their production activities as well as the environmental management of electromagnetic fields in its receiving towers. Furthermore, it promotes a community consumer awareness program through a telephone equipment collection campaign for equipment in disuse.

Vibra Agroindustrial S.A in Brazil has developed the attitude positiva crescimento sustentavel (Sustainable growth positive attitude) program which seeks to promote

the value of sustainability among its employees and their families not only in relation to business but also in their personal lives. This project develops responsible consumer practices in its participant's organizational processes and in their homes by means of behavior modification initiations and the adoption of positive attitudes toward resource optimization.

The Mexican technology company Softtek complies with industry environmental norms, preventing pollution and giving priority to clean energy. Additionally, however, it promotes the reuse and recycling of electronics that have fallen in disuse, thus fomenting responsible consumer practices.

Tecniamsa, a Colombian energy company, implements well-structured campaigns promoting environmental protection values in the company and the general community. It includes initiatives promoting sustainability practices among participants and children within the region, striving to make them collaborators and transmitters of environmental awareness. Emblematic holidays are observed (water day, soil day, tree day, etc.) to foster a true worldwide transformation.

The pharmaceutical company Argentina Droguería Rosfar, offers the Aguas Educa program in association with La Casa del Agua. It offers water conservation courses among students and faculty in low-income schools. In addition, it fosters knowledge about water's importance in life sustainability, water treatment processes and responsible water use. It also promotes community ties through a variety of planned activities governed by the same objective.

According to the Stern (2007) report, it is urgent that immediate, serious and forceful actions be developed to reduce polluting gas emissions and the indiscriminate destruction and consumption of environmental resources in addition to decreasing accumulated pollution. If governments and companies do not join forces to revert the damage, the finality will be the same: a couple of additional years will remain before reaching a point of no return.

Thus, this reflection proves to be enriching. Given that only 41% of the sample is generating actions that truly contribute to educating, sensitizing or even reverting climate change; we are still in debt to the world, so to speak. As previously pointed out, the private sector's participation in this matter has proven to be fundamental; therefore, without a true commitment from this front, nations can realistically do little to contribute to the fight against climate change.

If an organization's aim is to show a real interest in a sustainable world and environment including CSR projects that decrease its environmental impact is

plausible, yet can be considered incongruent. For social responsibility to materialize, it must permeate all organizational processes including why the company exists and what it does. Conversely, social responsibility will not become a reality if a company merely poses isolated actions proving to be temporary solutions that do not address the real source of the problem. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2011), even when CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are neutralized, climate changes will last for centuries. This is why it is necessary to contribute to reducing the damage.

#### **Final reflection, the urgency of doing something:**

According to the UNDP (PNUD, 2015), climate change will affect nation's development and individual's quality of life to such a degree that the human development index will be 8% lower by 2050 due to environmental upset. On the other hand, natural disasters are becoming more and more destructive, causing increasing economic and human losses. Just in 2005, hurricanes and typhoons provoked losses of 1.84 billion dollars (Stern, 2007). Furthermore, the World Health Organization (WHO) has calculated that the climate change produced, since the 1970's has annually caused more than 150,000 deaths which could double if the temperature increases by 1 °C (Stern, 2007). This is just a sampling of how necessary it is to reflect upon the active participation of all agents of interest in the fight against climate change.

Nations are indeed the most actively involved entities in generating anti-climate change policies; however, assuming the responsibility of past havoc and future damage does not rest on them alone. It is we, the private sector and the general population as citizens and consumers of goods and services, who must develop new, sustainable living habits. These habits must evolve from passively contributing to the problem to actively developing proposals to compensate for the footprints left by our own steps.

#### **CONCLUSION**

It is necessary that companies re-examine their social responsibility policies from an active participation perspective with an understanding that international commitments such as those proposed by the Global Compact not only focus on damage prevention but also damage recovery. This article's objective has been to reflect upon the diverse actions carried out by organizations in adherence to their nation's climate change commitments, assessing if these projects have truly contributed to improving the problem or if they have simply prevented its worsening. In conclusion, based on

the reports of Latin American World Compact signatory organizations, companies continue having a passive approach to environmental problems. Very few are truly committed to supporting their countries' international commitments. Although regrettable, these results must be considered an invitation to more organizations to actively join the fight against climate change given that ceasing or reducing pollution is not enough in a world that demands not only protection but immediate attention.

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