



# 13 CLIMATE ACTION



## MODERATORS

**Elizabeth Cousens and John Podesta**

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The 17 Rooms initiative is convened by the Brookings Institution and The Rockefeller Foundation to stimulate near-term cooperative actions to advance the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This document summarizes insights and actions that emerged from the working group discussions in Room 13 during the 17 Rooms 2020 flagship process. The text was independently prepared by the Room's Moderators and participants, in response to the common question asked of all Rooms in 2020: "In light of recent crises linked to COVID-19, systemic racism, and other urgent challenges, what are 1 to 3 actionable priorities over the coming 12-18 months that address near term needs while also making a decisive contribution to protecting or advancing your Goal's 2030 results? What actions can members of your Room take to advance these priorities?" Corresponding documents prepared by all the other Rooms are available [here](#), alongside a synthesis report prepared by the 17 Rooms secretariat.

The direction and nature of the global economic recovery over the next year will be driven by the large-scale response and recovery packages that are being developed and implemented by governments and international financial institutions. If targeted properly, these investments can jumpstart the low-carbon transition and avoid locking in high carbon assets for decades to come. However, we see many worrying signs—rising debt (especially in already heavily indebted developing countries), a raft of new coal projects being pursued and approved, and large amounts of rescue funding given to the fossil fuel industry with few to no conditions. By some estimates, twice the amount of money has been spent globally on rescuing the fossil fuel industry than on supporting low-carbon sectors. To “tip the scales,” we must focus on redirecting funding away from carbon lock-in and toward rapid growth in the development and deployment of low-carbon infrastructure. Infrastructure is particularly important – and was an area where progress was lagging even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

For a green investment-driven recovery to be successful, however, it needs to create – and be widely understood to create --a pathway for high-quality jobs, improved public health, environmental justice, energy access, and more inclusive economic growth within and across nations. This requires us to define and fund clear transition pathways for the individuals and communities whose livelihoods are now dependent on the fossil fuel industry and demonstrate that building a more sustainable economy is inextricably linked to the advancement of broader economic and social justice objectives.

Room 13 identified several signature initiatives/focus areas that could substantially contribute to the achievement of these interrelated goals, including:

- **G20-led green infrastructure initiative:** We need to make a decisive shift toward green infrastructure, and a G20 initiative focused on launching a new global platform– and/or elevating and upgrading an existing one– could catalyze that shift. A shared platform would help to prioritize and accelerate investments, disseminate policy ideas, provide risk mitigation tools, streamline funding processes, and ensure that low-carbon projects are cost-competitive with higher carbon ones, particularly in emerging and rapidly developing economies. The G20 is well situated to provide global strategic coordination and direction to such an infrastructure drive, including calling for and committing to build, sustain, and promote the platform, and would be a way to channel major overseas investment flows through the IFIs and the Belt and Road Initiative toward green investment.
- **Drive climate action through debt relief and swaps:** Debt challenges are rising to crisis levels in some countries— some have already defaulted this year and many others face that prospect in the coming months. This debt could be reduced, restructured, or canceled in a way that unlocks resources for national climate action. This could build on the bilateral “debt for nature swaps” that were first implemented in the 1980s and include exploring ways to support robust land restoration for ecosystems that have been decimated or heavily degraded.
- **Mobilize finance for targeted set of transformative “showcase” global projects:** To move beyond the incremental benefits that come with incremental change, and to catalyze excitement for truly transformative climate action, countries could prioritize and mobilize financing to drive such transformations and breakthroughs in a small number of priority areas, each with a clear geographic focus and on a short-term timeline.

One opportunity could be to launch an initiative on greening soft commodity supply chains (soy, palm oil, beef, timber), given the leading role these commodities play in tropical deforestation. This could build on the Bonn Challenge and New York Declaration on Forests and leverage the China-hosted Convention on Biological Diversity COP next year, which would align SDG 13 with other nature-related SDGs.

Another opportunity is to strategically align climate and energy access goals through a drive to significantly accelerate the deployment of distributed electricity systems in under-served communities across the developing world by bringing purchasing scale to new projects. Room 7 has proposed large-scale, coordinated public-private effort to drive down the costs of and build new markets for such energy systems, as well as other ideas aimed at building a clean energy future for all.

Other suggestions of showcase projects included 100 percent clean green islands, accelerated just coal transition, and a Congo Basin forest finance initiative.

- **Combine social policies with climate action:** Climate action needs to be closely tied to social and economic justice. The *gilets jaunes* (yellow vest) protests in France— which were triggered by a proposed tax increase on diesel fuel to fund national climate objectives— are a glaring example of what can happen when these priorities are not well aligned. On the other hand, we are seeing encouraging signs of such alignment in the resurgent environmental justice movement, including in the United States. We can help link the two by supporting the UN and its partners in their efforts to integrate the SDGs on jobs, health, education, and hunger, with the SDGs on climate, affordable and clean energy, sustainable production and consumption, and life on land and below water— at the international, national, and local level.
- **Accelerate the development and deployment of green hydrogen:** Green hydrogen could provide a new and important fuel source that is of unique value to hard-to-decarbonize sectors such as heavy industry, freight, and trucking. Building on the early efforts of the EU and Japan, a concerted international push to scale green hydrogen holds promise for enabling an accelerated low-carbon transition across sectors, including in Africa and Asia, where pilot projects are currently being planned. This initiative could be part of a new green infrastructure platform.
- **Build better data on impacts of green policies and investments:** Persuading policy makers to pursue a green path to economic recovery will require better evidence (especially for employment-intensive small businesses) showing that these policies and investments will indeed be more impactful than the familiar alternatives. More high quality, locally-relevant data, and information needs to be collected and shared on the full suite of benefits that will flow from particular policies and investments— perhaps most importantly in terms of job creation, but also associated benefits such as public health. Mayors, governors, sub-national actors, research think tanks, and international financial institutions (IFIs) financing relevant projects around the world can be critical partners in this undertaking. They can be a source of such data and make use of it to inform their own as well as national-level policy making.