

Enhancing Baku's Role in Global Negotiations to Combat Climate Change

Elevating Climate Diplomacy for a Greener Tomorrow

Parvana Babayeva

In the face of accelerating climate change, the world is approaching a critical juncture at which greater coordinated action will need to be seen as a global imperative. The impact of rising temperatures, extreme weather events, and increasingly shifting climate patterns demand an unwavering commitment to solutions that transcend national borders. It is within this context that international negotiations emerge as a linchpin in the global response to climate change, serving as the crucible where pathways toward a sustainable and resilient future are forged by states converging around a shared goal to which they have committed at the highest level time and again.

Mitigating the effects of climate change—a complex and interconnected challenge—calls for comprehensive and collaborative strategies. The interconnectedness of environmental, economic, and social factors is recognized in the context of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and states worldwide are supposed to unite through international negotiations to collectively address the multifaceted dimensions of this crisis. The urgency of the situation necessitates the transcendence of geopolitical divides, fostering cooperation beyond national interests in favor of a shared commitment to safeguarding our planet and the well-being of future generations.

Parvana Babayeva is a Senior Engineer in the Science and Technology Division of Ekol Engineering Services CJSC. She formerly worked as a Senior Engineer in the Science and Technology Division of SOCAR's Ecology Department. She holds a master's degree in energy science and policy from Ajou University in South Korea, a master's degree in environmental chemistry from Baku State University, and a bachelor's degree in chemistry from Baku State University. She is on the roster of experts for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The views and opinions expressed herein are solely those of the author.

The role of international negotiations in the fight against climate change and the subsequent implications for Azerbaijan are illuminated by this IDD Analytical Policy Brief. As a country both vulnerable to climate impacts and positioned to contribute to global mitigation efforts, the evolving dynamics of climate diplomacy and international climate negotiations have significant implications for the country's sustainable development trajectory, energy policies, and international partnerships. To that end, this document provides five key recommendations to strengthen Azerbaijan's position in international negotiations.

Azerbaijan's Complex Path in International Negotiations

Despite its strides in incorporating sustainable policies, Azerbaijan grapples with reconciling its energy-centric economy and its climate commitments. International negotiations have been instrumental in guiding Azerbaijan's journey thus far, evidenced by its ratification of the Paris Agreement and its National Determined Contributions (NDCs). Yet, the trajectory towards achieving these commitments remains challenging.

Firstly, the country's historical dependence on hydrocarbons has not only shaped its economy but also its societal structure, including employment perspectives and its regional development. Transitioning to a more sustainable model necessitates significant infrastructural, technological, and socio-economic shifts, which in turn requires substantial investments and capacity-building measures.

Secondly, as a developing country, Azerbaijan faces financial constraints in harnessing advanced green technologies and developing resilient infrastructures. The country's quest for financial and technical assistance often places it in a labyrinth of international politics, where developed states, despite their pledges, sometimes prioritize their domestic concerns over their global commitments.

Lastly, regional dynamics add another layer of complexity. The South Caucasus, with its blend of rich natural resources and intricate political relationships, presents both opportunities and challenges. As several previous IDD Analytical Policy Briefs have examined in detail, transboundary environmental issues, such as shared water resources, necessitate a regional approach. However, historical rivalries and political tensions can overshadow environmental urgencies.

While international negotiations present a beacon of hope and direction for Azerbaijan in its climate journey, several intrinsic and extrinsic factors create roadblocks. Addressing these nuances in international fora is paramount for Azerbaijan to effectively harness the potential of global collaboration and to shape a sustainable trajectory for its future.

Recommendation One: Elevate Climate Diplomacy

Over the last few decades, climate diplomacy has been transformed from merely being a component of environmental discussions to being centrally placed in worldwide diplomatic fora. An unparalleled level of international cooperation is demanded by the existential threat of climate change, and as the stakes have been heightened, the demand for specialized and targeted diplomatic strategies has also been increased. In this shifting geopolitical environment, the significance of dedicated climate envoys has been underscored.

When a traditional diplomat and a climate envoy are imagined as standing together, it is noted that while both have been trained in negotiation and representation skills, it is the climate envoy that is focused primarily, if not exclusively, on the multifaceted issue of climate change. By this specialization, a deeper understanding and expertise is offered, which has the potential to refine and uplift global climate discussions. In states like Azerbaijan, where the complex relationship between energy, economy, and environment is observed, the need for representatives who have been equipped not only with a deep understanding of these intricacies but also with the ability to communicate them effectively on global stages has been felt.

However, the responsibilities of a climate envoy have not been restricted merely to understanding and communication. Bridges have been built by them. Climate change, as a unique dilemma, has made it essential for countries to cooperate internationally and also, more dauntingly, to reconsider how their own development objectives are seen in light of the planet's collective health. By designating envoys dedicated to this mission, states have become further connected over common interests, consistent dialogues have been enabled, and amidst the many voices of global politics, the urgent plea for climate action has been kept from being overshadowed.

As the daunting challenges of global warming and its effects are navigated, the role of climate envoys as guiding compasses and stabilizing anchors in aligning national initiatives with global targets and ensuring the ongoing emphasis on climate action in global conversations has been realized.

Recommendation Two: Enhancing Trust and Accountability in Climate Action

In the complex tapestry of global climate talks, the enduring theme of trust is raised frequently. Trust is often seen as the foundation of international diplomacy, and its importance is magnified when grappling with multi-dimensional issues like climate change. Due to the interlinked nature of the world's ecosystem, actions taken by one state are inevitably affected by the climate path chosen by others. Thus, the significance of transparency and accountability in this scenario can't be overlooked.

In a country faced with the challenges of economic transformation and environmental dedication like Azerbaijan, the stakes are notably elevated. With its unique combination of abundant hydrocarbon resources and an unwavering commitment to a sustainable future, the climate actions of Azerbaijan are not only vital for its citizens but also have implications for the South Caucasus, the Silk Road region, and even beyond. Questions arise: How can Azerbaijan's dedication be verified by other countries? Alternatively, how can rhetorical assurances about global aid, technological exchanges, or sustainability-driven trade talks be received by Azerbaijan?

The pressing necessity for a uniform framework emphasizing transparency and accountability in climate initiatives is recognized. Such a system isn't merely viewed as an administrative instrument; it is perceived as a means to cultivate trust, enable well-informed choices, and bolster global collaboration. By states, it is used as a reflection of their endeavors, accomplishments, and challenges, but also as a guidepost for upcoming strategies and partnerships.

When the depths of transparency and accountability are explored, a plethora of elements, both measurable and abstract, are discovered that shape the speed and course of global climate initiatives. From metrics detailing emissions cuts to the intricate details of policy execution, a comprehensive perspective is required to truly understand and enhance the role of transparency in climate discussions.

Recommendation Three: Advocate for Regional Climate Platforms

In the intricate web of global politics and socio-economic intricacies, regions often serve as linchpins that holds together distinct yet interconnected narratives. For Azerbaijan, its position in the South Caucasus not only defines its geopolitical stance but also shapes its environmental challenges and opportunities. This region, characterized by its rich biodiversity, shared water resources, and common environmental challenges, presents an irrefutable case for enhanced regional cooperation on climate action.

The essence of regional climate platforms can be likened to a symphony orchestra, where each instrument, representing a state, plays a unique role and emits a unique sound. Yet, the magic only unfolds when they play in harmony, understanding each other's cues and rhythms. Similarly, while each country in the South Caucasus region has its distinct climate challenges and mitigation strategies, their shared environmental heritage demands a synchronized approach.

The Kura-Aras River Basin—which Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia all share (along with Iran and Türkiye)—is a case in point. As previous IDD Analytical Policy Papers have noted, this river system—which is essential for the area's agriculture, industry, and

drinking water—is in danger due to over-extraction, pollution, and the effects of climate change. A regional discourse where the issues, difficulties, and solutions are jointly defined and put into practice is necessary to address the health and sustainability of such shared resources.

Furthermore, the South Caucasus offers exceptional prospects for cooperative research, technology transfer, and capacity-building due to its shared history, culture, and socioeconomic ties. A regional climate platform can serve as a conduit for pooling resources, sharing best practices, and even jointly accessing international funds and technology.

However, both the advantage and challenge of regional platforms lie in their dual nature. While they hold the promise of efficient, tailored solutions, they also tread on the sensitive ground of regional politics and historical narratives. Hence, crafting such platforms requires a delicate balance of diplomacy, foresight, and genuine commitment to the shared vision of a sustainable and resilient region.

While the global canvas of climate change negotiations defines the broader strokes, it is the regional nuances captured through such platforms that will define the detailed picture for countries like Azerbaijan. In the face of climate change, fostering regional ties and collaborative action is not simply a diplomatic recommendation; it is an environmental imperative.

Recommendation Four: Link Climate Negotiations with Trade Agreements

Trade agreements have traditionally been regarded as cornerstones of international relations, responsible for molding the trajectories of global commerce and nurturing collaboration between countries. However, the need to view these frameworks through an environmental lens has become increasingly recognized, especially when countries like Azerbaijan are considered. Positioned strategically in the heart of the Silk Road region, major trade pathways are found in Azerbaijan and are now seen as potential conduits for sustainable trade initiatives.

The anchoring of Azerbaijan's economy in its abundant hydrocarbon assets has been facilitated by trade agreements, which have been instrumental in promoting the export of its oil and natural gas. As shifts in global economic perspectives are observed, with a growing emphasis on sustainability, the very concept of trade is also understood to be undergoing a transformation. A shift towards valuing the environmental implications of products in international markets is being noticed. Consequently, the importance attached to a product's carbon footprint, its subsequent environmental repercussions, and the sustainable strategies employed during its production are perceived to be increasingly significant in shaping global trade dynamics.

Challenges and opportunities are presented to Azerbaijan in this evolving scenario. The former stems from the necessity to reassess its trade tactics, ensuring that exports (whether hydrocarbons or other goods) are aligned with global environmental expectations. The latter, however, is seen as a chance to spearhead a revolutionary approach to trade—one rooted deeply in sustainability. When climate considerations are integrated into trade agreements, Azerbaijan could strike a better balance between economic prosperity and environmental responsibility.

Moreover, platforms for facilitating technological and informational exchanges are also provided by trade agreements. Access to cutting-edge sustainable technologies, best practices in eco-friendly resource management, and financial tools supporting green projects can potentially be granted to a country like Azerbaijan, which has recently begun to prioritize energy diversification and the incorporation of green technologies. Through the integration of climate considerations into trade frameworks, an alignment of Azerbaijan's economy with a globally-aware environmental market can be achieved.

Trade, which has long been seen as the economic mainstay for Azerbaijan, now requires a reimagined approach given the global emphasis on sustainability. The proactive integration of climate considerations into trade agreements should not simply be viewed as a forward-thinking step; for Azerbaijan, it needs to be perceived as a strategy to ensure its economic relevance in a world increasingly concerned with environmental sustainability.

Recommendation Five: Encourage Climate Partnerships

In the detailed mosaic of global climate change mitigation, the significance of partnerships between developed and developing states is often underscored. Historically, a broad divide has been observed between these groups, created by differences in economic development, technological progress, and disparate abilities to tackle environmental issues. Yet, as states are indiscriminately impacted by the borderless nature of climate change, the understanding that this gap must be bridged is becoming apparent.

Climate partnerships are typically perceived as initiatives where collaboration between economically developed countries and their developing peers is facilitated. The path of industrialization was treaded earlier by developed countries, and thus, expertise in technology, financial means, and experiences in environmental conservation are held by them. In contrast, rich biodiversity, indigenous ecological wisdom, and untapped green potential are often housed in developing countries. Furthermore, insights into resilience and adaptation strategies are provided by many of them, given their frontline position in facing the repercussions of climate change.

But why is this collective effort deemed so essential? A world can be envisioned in which each state deals with climate issues on its own, duplicating efforts, repeating

similar errors, and not benefiting from mutual understanding. Such an approach not only exhausts resources but also hampers the necessity to accelerate a cooperative global climate response. By encouraging the sharing of best practices, the distribution of more financial aid, and the sharing of pioneering technologies, synergies that let countries skip certain developmental phases are formed through climate partnerships. Sustainable progress is thus hastened, and a sense of international unity is nurtured.

Regarding climate action, the saying “our collective strength is determined by our most vulnerable member” holds significant resonance. As no respect for national borders is shown by escalating sea levels, severe droughts, and unpredictable climatic shifts, our countermeasures should also display such universality. More than mere cooperative endeavors, climate partnerships are viewed as the foundational pathways towards a future where worldwide challenges receive a cohesive global response.

A Necessary Step

The urgency of climate change is seen as requiring unparalleled collaboration, not just within states, but also amongst them.

Azerbaijan is at a pivotal moment in its journey to address this fundamental challenge, but also to play a more prominent role in this shared global endeavor. The contents of this paper should be understood in this light: for the country to maintain its momentum—and for Azerbaijan to take its place as a regional leader—the foregoing recommendations can serve as a blueprint to ensure Baku’s climate aspirations receive global recognition, trust, and endorsement.