

Institute Climate and Society



Principle 4



Sometimes, for a project to flourish and powerful actions to emerge, a space for good conversation is all it takes.

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About Institute Climate and Society

Institute Climate and Society (iCS) supports institutions that aim to strengthen the Brazilian economy through the reduction of inequality by tackling climate change and promoting sustainable solutions. In addition to financing projects, iCS promotes dialogue between sectors, gathers knowledge, and establishes networks of information, intelligence and cooperation in the promotion of the climate agenda.

What was the challenge?

In 2019, the federal government's inaction on climate change issues became worse. Brazilian governments, before 2019 had taken an international position in favour of biodiversity protection and addressing climate change, but a change of governments led to deprioritisation and attacks on the climate agenda.

The most significant challenge was fulfilling a role previously led by the Brazilian government. It was necessary to demonstrate that, under the leadership of several other actors, climate action remained robust in the country.

What was the response?

In a country as diverse as Brazil, iCS believed that the most effective way to organise international representation on climate action was to create an independent and unbranded convening space to facilitate the country's cross-sectoral participation at COP25. This place would be inclusive of multiple perspectives and would be recognised as a home by all Brazilians who participated in the event.

iCS facilitated the establishment of a coalition of Brazilian civil society organisations to create the Brazil Climate Action Hub. Its main objective was to host debates during COP25, held in Madrid, Spain, in 2019, that would help to profile Brazil's multi-sectoral climate action. This initiative was carried out at the following two COPs in Glasgow and Sharm El-Sheikh, and the debates marked an innovation in the way that activism was conducted in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) space, which was only possible with philanthropic support.

The Brazil Climate Action Hub invited input not just from environmental organisations but also from the business sector engaged in climate, nonprofit organisations, parliamentarians, national and local government, academia, youth, social movements, traditional communities and media. Since many of these actors had no other spaces in common, the Hub became one of respect for differences and unlikely dialogues.

Driving the climate change agenda in a fraught political landscape presented many challenges and required a neutral convener who would not favour any one sector's climate priorities above another. As a philanthropic organisation, iCS fulfilled a convening role that helped to level the playing field for all actors involved. To reinforce collective action within the Hub, organisations involved did not seek brand recognition, instead focusing on equitably engaging the diverse audience and different expertise existing within the group and united around a common objective: showcasing Brazilian climate action led by non-state actors. It was also a way to ensure equal participation from all sectors, avoiding power asymmetry between smaller organisations and organisations with larger communication and financial capacity. Finally, it was important for iCS and partners that all stakeholders and participants felt ownership of the initiative. Clearly defining and jointly agreeing on the hub's concept and objectives helped strengthen the feeling of ownership among the actors and enabled them to create an initiative without any individual branding.

To create collective ownership of the Hub among all the partners of the initiative, iCS played a coordinating, rather than a leading or curatorial role. The Institute called on the various participating actors to share what they believed would be important to discuss at the Hub. COP25 attracted significant political engagement, with parliamentarians like the President of the Senate and then Environmental Minister Ricardo Salles talking to participants from Brazilian society and other stakeholders present.

Recognising that an official United Nations event could be an intimidating environment, particularly for first-time COP attendees, iCS communicated clearly and checked in regularly with all actors within the Hub, and played a connecting role among them to support networking and potential partnerships. The Institute also ensured translation from English to Portuguese, which is not an official language at the United Nations. This commitment to diversifying participation helped broaden discussions and input, with topics like climate justice and gender, and food systems being added to the agenda of the Hub.

iCS undertook considerable financial and non-financial risks to realise the Hub. The Institute invested heavily to get actors to COP25, and the conferences that followed. These expenses sky-rocketed in the first year, when the conference — which was initially planned to take place in Chile — moved much further away from Brazil to Madrid. The risks continued even once the actors had convened at COP. Since the first edition of the Hub was being convened against the backdrop of a climate denialist Brazilian government at the time, its activities [were monitored by government spies](#). Such tensions were palpable but well-managed during COP25, for example, when the Minister of Environment at the time, Ricardo Salles engaged with members of civil society and vocal activists who opposed his views.

What have they learned?

- ✓ **Use the convening power of philanthropy to build collaborative spaces that give visibility to other sectors and drive collective actions.** Identify and mobilise key networks and organisations to diversify represented voices. iCS invited key networks that represented different views within the Brazilian context, such as CEBDS, the branch of the World Business Council for Sustainable Development Brazil, which represents companies that are addressing environmental issues in the country; and the Climate Observatory, which comprises almost 100 civil society organisations working on the climate agenda in the country.

The Hub even received requests for accreditation assistance from members of parliament and state governors, and the fact that they were willing to assist as many people as they could not only helped to build trust but gave the Institute the ability to play a connecting role among the various actors. Through the accreditation process, iCS used the opportunity to recommend meetings between key actors that had the potential to further collaborate on other key efforts in climate action.

- ✓ **Identify and clearly communicate central goals and shared objectives,** to bring different actors together for a shared goal. iCS found that managing political sensitivities, articulating a common rallying call that united all actors, and ensuring that the Hub was a welcoming and supportive space for new actors went a long way in bringing everyone to the table. It was very important, for example, to present the proposal for thematic agendas to be constructed, to validate all the organisations invited to form the Hub, as well as to hold meetings to present the political context and international negotiations to level knowledge and vision.

Encouraged by this uptake, the group realised that it was not only imperative to maintain this space for cross-sectoral dialogue but that they would need to deliberately broaden engagement by inviting representatives from the Black community, youth, and stakeholders who may not be familiar with, but were essential to, international discourse about the climate agenda. For the next two COPs, the Institute invested significant time and energy into diversifying participation from civil society and partners.

✓ **Acknowledge the impact of the different roles you play as a grantmaker.** Many of the actors within the Hub were iCS grantees, making it easy to conflate Hub discussions into project-related discussions and vice versa. To mitigate this, iCS prioritised transparency and clarity regarding the agenda and purposes of Hub-related meetings. Since grantmaking is its core function, iCS recognised the difficulty of separating its role as a convenor from that of a grantmaker and worked to overcome this power imbalance by creating a safe space for Hub actors to share their views without fear of financial support being compromised in any way. One of the main ways to overcome this possible conflict was to allocate a specific team to coordinate the Hub, different from programme officers responsible for approving projects, as well as sharing the management of the space with other organisations.

✓ **Be flexible and take risks.** Taking risks and being flexible in philanthropic investments is key to supporting innovative ideas. Recognise the role of philanthropy to explore ideas that may be disregarded in other sectors due to implementation barriers and invest in new ideas.

The first edition of the Hub presented many event-related challenges. For example, the physical space that the Hub was assigned at COP25, which needed to accommodate the many actors invited, was much smaller than anticipated. For future editions of the Hub, iCS invested time and energy into more effectively and creatively using the available space through music, art, sessions that encouraged physical movement, relaxation and reflection, and creating quiet spaces in which meetings and media interviews could be conducted. All these innovative elements made the space feel uniquely Brazilian and welcoming for all. This was especially useful since the first Hub served as Brazilian civil society's only representation at COP25, whereas the Brazilian government had its own pavilions at the COPs that followed. Rather than competing with the official government space, the Hub welcomed everyone, even serving as a space for government officials to hold meetings.

✓ **Foster a sense of collaboration and goodwill among your partners.** COP accreditation, which had previously been managed by the Brazilian government, is usually a bureaucratic and cumbersome process, now included an open call for civil society participation, which iCS learnt about well ahead of the event. Brazilian and even some international organisations pooled extra badges attained for observation within the most relevant negotiation spaces at the conference, which other organisations could apply for via the Hub.

As the Hub facilitated a more accessible opportunity for organisations to be accredited as observers of negotiations, there was a significant increase in diverse engagement, encouraging organisations that had previously not been involved to learn more about the observer role. This process helped to foster a sense of collaboration and goodwill among the Hub partners ahead of the event.

✓ **Monitor impact results and consider previously unmapped results – many of which may be qualitative.** As systemic results and long-term impact could not yet be measured, iCS' team needed to convince the board that this was not just an event being hosted on the sidelines of COP, but was in fact, directly aiding the Institute's strategic goals. The main argument initially — apart from counter-balancing the political context — was that it was strategic for Brazilian civil society to use an international 'safe' space to demonstrate its commitment to climate action since it did not have a domestic space in which to convene key voices, and that this would also motivate and empower local actors to stay the course under difficult political conditions.

Key outcomes and impact indicators

iCS recently

completed an external evaluation of the initiative, which included interviews with actors and reviews of news and reports. It is difficult to quantitatively measure impact but the significant Brazilian media coverage of COP, both related and unrelated to the Hub, was significant. Thanks to the communication strategy around the initiative, which included a digital awareness campaign; capacity building for coverage of environmental issues specifically related to COP proceedings — which was provided to up to as many as 50 journalists; and hosting members of Brazil's mainstream media at the event, an increased media coverage was ensured.

This was important for local environmental advocacy and education and helped to profile a range of organisations working to address climate issues. The Hub facilitated participation from and engagement with the transition government. In 2022, iCS's and partners' efforts to maintain the country's relevance within the international climate agenda were recognised by then president-elect Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and new ministers, who met with civil society during COP27 to demonstrate openness to cooperation.

Organisations

that had not previously expressed interest in the international climate agenda began to observe the COPs and engage in the issues due to their engagement in the Hub.

The forging

of new partnerships was made possible by meetings between different organisations which took place during COPs, as well as during preparation for events. Through the Hub, several memorandums of understanding, [sectoral pledges](#) and declarations [on the relevance of democracy](#) for environmental policies and the climate agenda were launched, and many meetings and events with international embassies and governments were hosted.