

Concept Outline: Climate Assets

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Overview

This summarizes the preliminary concept of a *Climate Asset*, offered as a novel concept to unify diverse social and ecological concerns under a single framework to support holistic policy, strategic advocacy, and novel research, particularly in debates over the procurement of energy-transition metals, minerals, and materials (ETM).

Working Definition

A **Climate Asset** is *any place-based socioecological configuration that enhances climate change mitigation and adaptation while preserving and increasing local and regional social resilience, especially in conditions of intensifying climate extremes*. This includes any organism, community, or system that meets one of the following criteria:

1. **Provides Ecosystem Services:** This includes environmental features and symbiotic social practices that maintain the ability of the natural world to provision healthy food, clean air and water, and to regulate weather and climate. Examples include forests that prevent landslides, healthy soils that produce nutrient-rich food, biodiversity that limits the spread of pathogens, and communities that are empowered to care for their environment and each other.
2. **Protects Communities & Landscapes from Extreme Weather Events:** Similar to ecosystem services, these are environmental features and symbiotic social practices that shield communities from current and anticipated extremes. For example, healthy forests protect local communities and larger regions from high temperatures, floods, drought, desertification, and the spread of disease. Subsistence agriculture, nomadic pastoralism, and urban gardens support self-determination and resilience and reduce community reliance on emissions-heavy global supply chains.
3. **Slows the Rate of Global Warming:** This includes organisms, environmental features, or social systems that reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Familiar examples include the roles of forests and healthy soils in storing carbon. A less familiar example is the role of methane-eating microorganisms in deep seabed that prevent potent greenhouse gasses from reaching the atmosphere.

Destruction of any climate asset results in increased vulnerability and dependence.

Purpose

The Climate Assets Framework:

1. Provides **strategic simplification** of diverse concerns into a single category for specific contexts where diverse social, environmental, and climate interests are likely to confront proposals for—and proponents of—large-scale land use change at the expense of local landscapes and livelihoods, such as mining or infrastructure construction.
2. **Rebalances** the discussion of climate trade-offs, which is currently heavily weighted in favor of the potential future benefits of large-scale mining and infrastructure construction at the expense of present socioecological stability.
3. Enables **benchmarking** of proposed and ongoing programs, such as assessing whether development projects or policy changes result in a loss or gain of climate assets.

Problem Statement

The climate benefits of diverse ecosystems and livelihood practices, particularly those of Indigenous and land-connected peoples, are described by many different concepts, worldviews, and scientific disciplines. While diversity in terminology and perspective is itself beneficial, the lack of a unifying framework in ETM-focused scientific research and policy debates can result in the discounting of environments, organisms, or communities that mitigate climate change and enhance climate resilience relative to the urgent need to transition away from fossil fuels. One result is disagreement over the best pathway toward a stable climate and healthy communities, exemplified by the growing narrative of the need to expand industrial mining operations into Indigenous and agrarian landscapes as a “necessary evil” to address the climate emergency. This situation has enabled interests hostile to climate stability and human rights to leverage the tactics of division, diversion, and distraction to prevent climate and development policy that is both holistic and decisive:

1. **Divide & Conquer** (*division*): Leveraging difference, disagreement, and competition among causes to weaken alternatives to unsustainable systems. For example, pitting renewable energy generation against biodiversity conservation rather than decisively reducing energy demand and waste.
2. **False Hierarchies** (*distraction*): Ranking environments, livelihoods, and communities on the basis that only some can be preserved from the impacts of industrial extraction and development. For example, presenting deep seabed extraction as the only alternative to mining-led deforestation rather than limiting non-essential uses of ETM.
3. **Quantitative Obscurantism** (*diversion*): The use of quantitative data in contrast to and at the expense of qualitatively-expressed concerns. For example: readily quantifying projected metal demand for the energy transition while dismissing human well-being and regional climate stability as ‘intangible.’

Comments Requested

Categorizing diverse causes under a single category is a simplification that can be problematic. Simplifying exercises are vulnerable to omission, erasure, and co-optation. This framework is intended to provide a guiding concept to facilitate discussion across disparate interest groups. As a new concept currently under development for submission to larger research and policy communities, your thoughts, concerns, and comments are highly valued. Specifically we would welcome input on the following:

1. Sites or communities that meet the definition criteria, but have been historically excluded from protections or special considerations
2. Potential misinterpretations, co-optations, or misuse
3. Best practices for adaptation to different cultural, policy, advocacy, and research contexts
4. Suggestions for accessible communication, translation, and use of the concept
5. Other thoughts, reflections, or suggestions not listed here

