International IDEA

DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS FOR THE FUTURE: THE EXPERIENCE OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Training Curriculum Overview



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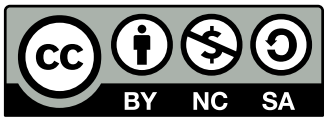
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INTRODUCTION

Democracies around the world face existing and emerging long-term challenges, from climate change and demographic shifts to fiscal pressures and the rapid development of new technologies. Yet democratic institutions are often ill-equipped to respond to them. Electoral cycles, political incentives and constraints, the influence of vested interests, and the difficulty of identifying the interests of future generations—all favor short-term decision-making. Climate change is among the clearest tests of this problem: it affects political communities in profound ways, and it demands responses that go well beyond a mandate resulting from a single election.

This training curriculum has been developed by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) on the basis of knowledge, gained in the field, about democracy and climate change, and about institutional innovations for future generations. The curriculum is designed to help participants understand the challenges and explore how formal democratic institutions can adapt to them and reform themselves.

The curriculum is designed to help participants understand the challenges and explore how formal democratic institutions can adapt to them and reform themselves.

Drawing on practical examples from around the world, the curriculum examines the relationship between climate change and democratic governance, and it presents a range of institutional innovations that aim to protect the interests of future generations. These cover constitutions, executive authorities, parliaments, courts, and dedicated advisory and oversight bodies. Each session combines key concepts with case studies and interactive discussions.

The program targets a wide range of audiences, including:

- policymakers and legislators, who can apply these tools in their institutions;
- analysts and researchers, who support and inform decision-making; and
- civil society actors, who play a vital role in advocating for long-term thinking and holding institutions to account.

The curriculum is intended to foster exchange among these groups, allowing participants to learn from each other's national and professional perspectives.

The training can be delivered either in person or remotely. In person, it is built around presentations and open discussion. Remotely, it combines recorded presentations, videos, clips of guest speakers, and online forums. Estimated durations are given for each session in both formats.

The structure of the curriculum is modular, and the activities can be selected to design a tailored program most relevant to the institutional context, priorities, and available time of the learners.

The structure of the curriculum is modular. Two model agendas are offered, as possible options for rolling out the in-person training program over either four days or five days. However, the activities can also be selected to design a tailored program that includes the sessions most relevant to the institutional context, priorities, and available time of the learners.

Depending on the agreed structure, a group exercise can also form part of the concluding session. It consists of a simulation of a negotiation among different stakeholders, in which participants apply what they have learned and experience, first-hand, the difficulty of balancing present needs with the interests of future generations.

The following pages set out the descriptions, learning outcomes, key subtopics, case studies, and methodology for each activity, followed by the four-/five-day model agendas and the guidelines for the group exercise.

ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE TRAINING PROGRAM

Description

This session introduces the objectives of the training program, as well as the main topics tackled in the curriculum, including the key understandings and learning outcomes. This session also illustrates the agenda.

Learning Outcomes

- an understanding of the training objectives, curriculum structure, key learning outcomes, and ways in which the agenda supports overall capacity development

Key Subtopics

- list of activities and learning outcomes

Learning Methodology

- in person: presentation and discussion
- online: recorded presentation and online forum

Estimated Duration

- in person: 1 hour
- online: 20/30 minutes

ACTIVITY 2: LONG-TERM CHALLENGES FOR DEMOCRACIES

Description

This session examines, in broad strokes, some long-term existential challenges for democracies. It argues that most current governance systems, including democracies, are ill-equipped to address long-term challenges effectively, owing mainly to a short-term bias associated with electoral cycles, political incentives and constraints, and the difficulties of determining the precise interests of future generations.

Learning Outcomes

- an understanding of basic notions about fundamental current and emerging long-term challenges to democratic governance

Key Subtopics

- key principles of democratic governance
- climate change and the "Triple Planetary Crisis" (climate, the loss of biodiversity, and pollution)
- demographic crisis, fiscal policies, infrastructure
- artificial intelligence
- Q&A (for in-person participants)

Case Studies

- Case study 1: The German pension system
- Case study 2: The international debate over AI regulation

Learning Methodology

- in person: presentation and discussion
- online: recorded presentation, videos and clips of guest speakers, online forum

Estimated Duration

- in person: 1.5 hours (in the 4-day model agenda); 2 hours (in the 5-day model agenda)
- online: 1 hour

ACTIVITY 3: THE CLIMATE–DEMOCRACY NEXUS

Description

This session zooms in on the main thematic focus of the curriculum. It reviews the multiple interlinkages between the climate crisis and democratic systems, in terms of both the impacts of climate change on political communities and the roles that democratic institutions play in responding to climate change.

Learning Outcomes

- an understanding of different aspects of the bi-directional relationship between climate change and political governance

Key Subtopics

- the impact of climate change on democracies and democratic governance (quick onset/slow onset)
- the structural weakness of democracies in dealing with climate change (short-termism, complexity, cumbersomeness of proceedings, vulnerability to vested interests)
- the assets of democracies in dealing with climate change (free circulation of information, transparency, accountability, participation)
- comparison with autocracies
- Q&A (for in-person participants)

Case Studies

- Case study 1: Natural hazards and elections in India—lessons in adaptation and mitigation
- Case study 2: Debunking climate misinformation

Learning Methodology

- in person: presentation and discussion
- online: recorded presentation, videos and clips of guest speakers, online forum

Estimated Duration

- in person: 2 hours
- online: 2 hours

ACTIVITY 4: INSTITUTIONAL INNOVATIONS FOR THE FUTURE: CONSTITUTIONS

Description

This session examines how constitutions can anchor long-term commitments in legislative systems, by comparing the legal significance and potential impacts of different types of constitutional provisions. The session also considers how constitutional commitments can (or must) be translated into practice, while balancing current generations' needs with the imperative of environmental protection.

Learning Outcomes

- an understanding of examples of constitutional provisions aiming to protect the interests of future generations

Key Subtopics

- constitutional provisions on future generations: symbolic references, directive principles, state duties, and enforceable rights
- ecological protection: environmental rights, conservation of biodiversity and natural resources, and intergenerational duties
- economic stewardship: sustainable development, fiscal responsibility, and mechanisms for intergenerational benefit-sharing
- climate governance: commitments to mitigation, adaptation, and international cooperation
- Q&A (for in-person participants)

Case Studies

- Case study 1: Bhutan's constitutional ecosystem of intergenerational stewardship
- Case study 2: Tuvalu's climate-responsive constitution: perpetual statehood and climate governance in the face of the existential threat of climate change

Learning Methodology

- in person: presentation and discussion
- online: recorded presentation, videos and clips of guest speakers, online forum

Estimated Duration

- in person: 2 hours
- online: 2 hours

ACTIVITY 5: INSTITUTIONAL INNOVATIONS FOR THE FUTURE: THE EXECUTIVE

Description

This session presents a range of practices and tools that governments, at the national and local levels, can adopt to improve their ability to include long-term concern and intergenerational equity in their policymaking.

Learning Outcomes

- an understanding of examples of democratic innovations in the way local and national executive authorities design, implement, and report on long-term policies

Key Subtopics

- in-house scientific and technical expertise
- strategic foresight and anticipatory governance
- intergenerational impact assessments
- accountability for international commitments
- Q&A (for in-person participants)

Case Studies

- Case study 1: Spain's National Office of Foresight and Strategy
- Case study 2: Costa Rica's regular updates on its decarbonization plan/ Canada's intergenerational impact assessments

Learning Methodology

- in person: presentation and discussion
- online: recorded presentation, videos and clips of guest speakers, online forum

Estimated Duration

- in person: 2 hours
- online: 2 hours

ACTIVITY 6: INSTITUTIONAL INNOVATIONS FOR THE FUTURE: PARLIAMENTS

Description

This session considers a series of implemented or proposed parliamentary reforms designed to help legislatures (a) build long-term thinking into their everyday working practices and (b) ensure that the interests of future generations are considered, while carrying out the functions of lawmaking, oversight of the executive, and budget approval.

Learning Outcomes

- an understanding of examples of democratic innovations in the way parliamentary assemblies are structured and perform their functions

Key Subtopics

- external inputs in parliamentary debates
- tools for forward-looking lawmaking and oversight
- parliamentary institutions for the future
- electoral laws and political rights
- Q&A (for in-person participants)

Case Studies

- Case study 1: The Finnish Parliament's Committee for the Future
- Case study 2: The Chilean Senate's Committee for Future Challenges, Science, Technology, and Innovation

Learning Methodology

- in person: presentation and discussion
- online: recorded presentation, videos and clips of guest speakers, online forum

Estimated Duration

- in person: 2 hours
- online: 2 hours

ACTIVITY 7: INSTITUTIONAL INNOVATIONS FOR THE FUTURE: THE COURTS

Description

This session examines the role of courts in addressing long-term climate challenges and protecting the interests of young people and future generations. It explores how climate litigation can strengthen the rule of law, rights protection, transparency, and state accountability, while raising questions about the separation of powers and the accessibility, effectiveness, and implementation of legal remedies. Particular attention is given to youth-led climate litigation as a means of advocating for intergenerational justice.

Learning Outcomes

- an understanding of ways in which courts and climate litigation can protect rights and the interests of future generations
- an assessment of the opportunities and limitations as regards judicial intervention and the implementation of climate rulings.

Key Subtopics

- judicial review of climate obligations: constitutional rights, intergenerational equity, and international commitments
- the democracy nexus: climate litigation and rights protection, access to justice, public participation, accountability, and transparency
- democratic opportunities and limitations: separations of powers, unequal access, strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs), and backlash
- implementation: judicial remedies, political responses, compliance monitoring
- Q&A (for in-person participants)

Case Studies

- Case study 1: *Neubauer et al. v. Germany* (2021)—youth-led climate litigation, intergenerational freedom, and legislative responses
- Case study 2: *Do-Hyun Kim et al. v. South Korea* (2024)—youth-led climate litigation, constitutional protection of future generations

Learning Methodology

- in person: presentation and discussion
- online: recorded presentation, videos and clips of guest speakers, online forum

Estimated Duration

- in person: 2 hours
- online: 2 hours

ACTIVITY 8: INSTITUTIONAL INNOVATIONS FOR THE FUTURE: DEDICATED BODIES

Description

This session explores the role and potential impact of dedicated, often independent, bodies with a specific mandate related to the future. Alongside established democratic institutions, this relatively new typology of actors can play a crucial role in ensuring the representation of the interests of future generations, and in contributing to—and overseeing—the work of governments and parliaments.

Learning Outcomes

- an understanding of examples of dedicated advisory and oversight bodies established to represent and promote the interests of future generations
- an understanding of those bodies' interactions with other democratic institutions

Key Subtopics

- formal independent commissioners or ombudspersons
- informal and subnational commissioners or ombudspersons
- research and advisory bodies
- impact on policy design and implementation, challenges and opportunities
- Q&A (for in-person participants)

Case Studies

- Case study 1: The UK Climate Change Committee
- Case study 2: The Indigenous Commissioner for Future Generations (Cameroon)

Learning Methodology

- in person: presentation and discussion
- online: recorded presentation, videos and clips of guest speakers, online forum

Estimated Duration

- in person: 2 hours
- online: 2 hours

ACTIVITY 9: CONCLUSION OF THE TRAINING PROGRAM

Description

This session offers the space to recap the main contents of the curriculum and to openly discuss experiences, needs, and recommendations among participants, based on their different national and professional perspectives. Subject to availability of time, learners take part in a group exercise, focusing on the simulation of a negotiation among different stakeholders.

Learning Outcomes

- an appreciation of the main topics discussed during the training
- a contribution to comprehensive discussion from the learner's experience and point of view.

Key Subtopics

- summary of key learning points
- open discussion (for in-person participants)
- group exercise—simulation (for in-person participants, 5-day agenda only)
- conclusion of the program

Learning Methodology

- in person: discussion
- online: recorded presentation, online forum

Estimated Duration

- in person: 2.5 hours
- online: 1 hour

GROUP EXERCISE: SIMULATION ON NEGOTIATING FOR THE FUTURE

Scenario

The country in which you live, named Futoria, is facing increasing pressures because climate change is affecting agriculture, infrastructure, and public health. Government debt continues to grow, so in order to remain economically competitive and improve the quality of life, Futoria needs major investment in public infrastructure, housing, and energy. Meanwhile, young people, distressed by diminishing life opportunities, have begun protesting in the streets, calling for the resignation of the current government.

Following a national debate, the government has launched a process to create a "Pact for the Future". Three stakeholder groups have been invited to negotiate a package of constitutional, institutional, and political reforms. The stakeholder groups are:

- Group 1: Youth and future generations coalition
- Group 2: Elected political representatives
- Group 3: Alliance of industry representatives and employers' associations

The aims of the reforms are to help the country protect future generations while boosting opportunities for young people and safeguarding economic development and democratic norms.

Your Task

Your task is to negotiate and agree on three institutional innovations to be adopted over the next five years.

The Negotiation Process

1. Group Preparations

Discuss your group's priorities, your preferred innovations, and their potential benefits and trade-offs.

2. Negotiation

Negotiate a common package of three innovations. Consider constitutional provisions, electoral reforms, parliamentary mechanisms, executive tools, judicial accountability, and dedicated institutions for future generations. You may adapt or combine proposals and negotiate their mandates, powers, and implementation arrangements.

3. Format

Participants are divided into negotiation tables, ideally comprising six participants per table, with two representatives from each of the three stakeholder groups. Depending on the total number of participants, several negotiations can take place simultaneously, with each table developing its own Pact for the Future.

At the end of the negotiation, each table will present its Pact for the Future to the plenary. The different agreements will then be compared to explore how negotiation dynamics, stakeholder priorities, and institutional choices influence the outcomes.

Remember: While the groups may have different priorities, their interests are not necessarily opposed. It may be fruitful to look for shared objectives and mutually beneficial solutions, while recognizing potential trade-offs.

4. Presentation of the Pact for the Future

Present the final Pact for the Future, explaining the selected innovations, the interests they advance, and the compromises, if any, reached.

5. Plenary Reflection

Discuss the negotiation experience and reflect on the outcomes.

Potential questions for reflection:

- Looking at the different pacts presented, what surprised you most about the agreements reached or the differences between them?
- Did playing your assigned role change how you understood the priorities and perspectives of other stakeholders? Where did you find unexpected common ground or difficult disagreements?
- What insights has the exercise given you about the ability of democracies and democratic processes to reconcile potentially competing priorities, identify shared interests, and make long-term decisions? What is the role of institutional innovation in this?

MODEL AGENDA FOR IN-PERSON TRAINING (4 DAYS)

Table 1. **Day 1**

Time	Session
09:00–09:30	Arrival and registration
09:30–10:30	(1) Introduction to the Training Program
10:30–11:00	Break
11:00–12:30	(2) Long-Term Challenges for Democracies
12:30–14:00	Lunch
14:00–15:00	(3) The Climate–Democracy Nexus
15:00–15:30	Break
15:30–16:30	(3) The Climate–Democracy Nexus (continued)
16:30–17:00	Conclusion Day 1

Table 2. **Day 2**

Time	Session
09:00–09:30	Recap Day 1 and outstanding questions
09:30–10:30	(4) Institutional Innovations for the Future: Constitutions
10:30–11:00	Break
11:00–12:00	(4) Institutional Innovations for the Future: Constitutions (continued)
12:00–14:00	Lunch
14:00–15:00	(5) Institutional Innovations for the Future: The Executive
15:00–15:30	Break
15:30–16:30	(5) Institutional Innovations for the Future: The Executive (continued)
16:30–17:00	Conclusion Day 2

Table 3. **Day 3**

Time	Session
09:00–09:30	Recap Day 2 and outstanding questions
09:30–10:30	(6) Institutional Innovation for the Future: Parliaments
10:30–11:00	Break
11:00–12:00	(6) Institutional Innovation for the Future: Parliaments (continued)
12:00–14:00	Lunch
14:00–15:00	(7) Institutional Innovations for the Future: The Courts
15:00–15:30	Break
15:30–16:30	(7) Institutional Innovations for the Future: The Courts (continued)
16:30–17:00	Conclusion Day 3

Table 4. **Day 4**

Time	Session
09:00–09:30	Recap Day 3 and outstanding questions
09:30–10:30	(8) Institutional Innovations for the Future: Dedicated bodies
10:30–11:00	Break
11:00–12:00	(8) Institutional Innovations for the Future: Dedicated Bodies (continued)
12:00–14:00	Lunch
14:00–15:00	(9) Conclusion
15:00–15:30	Break
15:30–16:30	(9) Conclusion (continued) and Wrap-Up

MODEL AGENDA FOR IN-PERSON TRAINING (5 DAYS)

Table 5. **Day 1**

Time	Session
09:00–10:00	Arrival and registration
10:00–11:00	(1) Introduction to the Training Program
11:00–11:30	Break
11:30–12:30	(2) Long-Term Challenges for Democracies
12:30–14:00	Lunch
14:00–15:00	(2) Long-Term Challenges for Democracy (continued)
15:00–15:30	Break
15:30–16:00	Conclusion Day 1

Table 6. **Day 2**

Time	Session
09:00–09:30	Recap Day 1 and outstanding questions
09:30–10:30	(3) The Climate–Democracy Nexus
10:30–11:00	Break
11:00–12:00	(3) The Climate–Democracy Nexus (continued)
12:00–13:00	Lunch
13:00–14:00	(4) Institutional Innovations for the Future: Constitutions
14:00–14:30	Break
14:30–15:30	(4) Institutional Innovations for the Future: Constitutions (continued)
15:30–16:00	Conclusion Day 2

Table 7. **Day 3**

Time	Session
09:00–09:30	Recap Day 2 and outstanding questions
09:30–10:30	(5) Institutional Innovations for the Future: The Executive
10:30–11:00	Break
11:00–12:00	(5) Institutional Innovations for the Future: The Executive (continued)
12:00–13:00	Lunch
13:00–14:00	(6) Institutional Innovations for the Future: Parliaments
14:00–14:30	Break
14:30–15:30	(6) Institutional Innovations for the Future: Parliaments (continued)
15:30–16:00	Conclusion Day 3

Table 8. **Day 4**

Time	Session
09:00–09:30	Recap Day 3 and outstanding questions
09:30–10:30	(7) Institutional Innovations for the Future: The Courts
10:30–11:00	Break
11:00–12:00	(7) Institutional Innovations for the Future: The Courts (continued)
12:00–13:00	Lunch
13:00–14:00	(8) Institutional Innovations for the Future: Dedicated Bodies
14:00–14:30	Break
14:30–15:30	(8) Institutional Innovations for the Future: Dedicated Bodies (continued)
15:30–16:00	Conclusion Day 4

Table 9. **Day 5**

Time	Session
09:00–09:30	Recap Training Program
09:30–10:30	(9) Conclusion: Group Exercise
10:30–11:00	Break
11:00–12:00	(9) Conclusion: Group Exercise (continued)
12:00–13:00	Lunch
13:00–14:00	(9) Conclusion: Open Discussion
14:00–14:30	Wrap-Up

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This training curriculum is based entirely on International IDEA's existing body of work. The main source publications are listed below. For a more extensive bibliography, we recommend using the references contained within these publications.

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Michele Poletto is an expert in environmental governance and sustainable development, and he works as Adviser on Climate Change and Democracy in International IDEA's Political Participation and Representation Programme. Prior to joining the Institute, he worked for more than 15 years on environmental and humanitarian programs in Africa, Europe, and Latin America within the United Nations system, including with the UN Environment Programme and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

About International IDEA

The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) is an intergovernmental organization with 35 Member States founded in 1995, with a mandate to support sustainable democracy worldwide.

WHAT WE DO

We develop policy-friendly research related to elections, parliaments, constitutions, digitalization, climate change, inclusion, and political representation, all under the umbrella of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. We assess the performance of democracies around the world through our unique Global State of Democracy Indices.

We provide capacity development and expert advice to democratic actors including governments, parliaments, election officials, and civil society. We develop tools and publish databases, books, and primers in several languages on topics ranging from voter turnout to gender quotas.

We bring states and non-state actors together for dialogues and lesson sharing. We stand up and speak out to promote and protect democracy worldwide.

WHERE WE WORK

Our headquarters is in Stockholm, and we have regional and country offices in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe, and Latin America and the Caribbean. International IDEA is a Permanent Observer to the United Nations and is accredited to European Union institutions.

OUR PUBLICATIONS AND DATABASES

We have a catalogue with more than 1,000 publications and over 25 databases on our website. Most of our publications can be downloaded free of charge.

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Democracies around the world face major long-term challenges, including climate change, the use of new technologies, and demographic shifts, but they are often ill-equipped to respond to them, mainly because of a short-term mindset influenced by electoral cycles, political incentives and constraints, and vested interests. At the same time, young people increasingly demand that their interests be acknowledged and their future opportunities protected.

Based on International IDEA research on institutional innovations and climate governance, this curriculum overview describes a set of training modules designed to support the strengthening of formal democratic institutions—including governments, parliaments, and independent agencies—for long-term policymaking, with specific reference to climate and environmental policies. Targeting decision-makers, analysts, and civil society actors, the overview presents a set of activities that can be rolled out in person or remotely and adapted to the needs and interests of participants.

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