

2022 GUIDE FOR CLIMATE CHANGE JOURNALISTS



INTRODUCTION

01

GLOSSARY

02

HOW TO CREATE
EFFECTIVE NARRATIVES
ABOUT CLIMATE
CHANGE

03

HOW TO APPROACH CLIMATE
CHANGE IN THE NEWSROOM

04

HOW TO COVER CLIMATE
NEGOTIATION EVENTS

05

HOW TO USE SOCIAL MEDIA
TO CONNECT WITH OLD
AND NEW AUDIENCES

INTRODUCTION

Environmental journalists have worked for decades to increase awareness of the imminent climate crisis. They did so long before the issue ever made the front page, or companies had sustainability departments, or political figures spoke out on climate matters. The first environmental journalists were trailblazers in both greater society and in newsrooms. But they weren't alone on the front lines. They gave voice to respected sources such as the scientific community and environmental NGOs.

With growing media coverage on TV and radio programs, websites, and social media pages, people today are more aware than ever of the threat climate change poses. Climate journalists, however, continue to face challenges, both old and new. Some of these challenges mirror transformations across the news industry, with traditional formats giving way to new forms of connecting with audiences, such as image-heavy social media content. Meanwhile, audiences can feel overwhelmed by the sense of urgency and pessimism dominating climate news, while some have become distrustful of such information amid the rise of “fake news.”

Given this state of affairs, journalists in Latin America and the Caribbean now more than ever play a fundamental civic role. First, they learn and break down the latest scientific knowledge to make it easy to understand. Second, they cover technical negotiations to give citizens the opportunity to weigh in on both regional and international public policy processes. In addition, journalists experiment with different formats to find innovative ways to engage their audiences. Finally, they use calls to action to invite audiences to take part in what stands to be the defining issue of the 21st century: decarbonizing our economies.

This guide contains advice and insights from global journalists whose reporting balances these responsibilities. It was compiled to provide professionals with the information they need to jointly shape climate journalism for the 21st century. The following sections are based on presentations from the “Climate Change Concepts and Narratives” workshop organized by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) in July 2022. The workshop’s participants included: **Benoit Lefevre**, senior specialist at the IDB’s Climate Change Division; **Michelle Soto**, science and environmental journalist at Ojo al Clima and Periodistas por el Planeta; **Diego Arguedas**, climate journalist and member of the Oxford Climate Journalism Network; **Arturo Larena**, director of environment and science at EFE Noticias and EFEverde; **Tais Gadea Lara**, climate journalist; and **Pilar Celi**, head of multilateral projects at Libélula; with contributions from **Pilar Assefh**, founder of Periodistas por el Planeta.

We thank them for generously sharing their knowledge and experience, and we admire their work and commitment to raise awareness about the importance of this issue.

The production of this guide was coordinated by **Ángela Funez** and **Javier Salgado** of the IDB Communications Division. It was written by communications consultant **Lucila Pinto**. **Graham Watkins**, Chief of the Climate Change Division at the IDB, provided technical support, as did **Catalina Aguiar** and **Alejandra París**, from the same division.

01

GLOSSARY



What is climate change?

“Climate change” means a change of climate which is attributed directly or indirectly to human activity that alters the composition of the global atmosphere and which is in addition to natural climate variability observed over comparable time periods. In other words, it means changes over and above the climate variability we would expect due to natural reasons.

What causes climate change?

Many of the activities we carry out—such as heating or cooling our homes, using fossil-fuel vehicles for transportation, and producing livestock—emit carbon dioxide (CO₂) and other gases known as greenhouse gases. When these gases become concentrated in the atmosphere, they form a layer that acts like a greenhouse, trapping solar radiation in the atmosphere and causing temperatures to rise. This leads to global warming, which is the increase in the global mean surface temperature, averaged over a 30-year period.

What are its main causes?

The two main drivers of climate change are increased greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and the atmosphere’s declining capacity to absorb these gases. On the one hand, we are emitting more and more GHGs into the atmosphere, such as the methane generated by open dumps and fracking. On the other hand, deforestation and degradation of oceans and soils has reduced the ability of forests, mangroves, soils, and oceans to absorb CO₂ from the air. Combined, these two processes cause solar radiation to become trapped in the atmosphere, which creates global warming.

The consequences will be devastating, particularly for the poorest and most vulnerable countries and communities.



Why is it important to take action against climate change?

Human activity has already pushed average global temperatures to 1.2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. If this trend continues and exceeds 1.5 degrees, the consequences will be devastating, particularly for the poorest and most vulnerable countries and communities. Indeed, many of these populations have already been forced to migrate due to changes in climate and agricultural practices, as well as extreme weather events like floods and droughts. These assertions are supported by science.

What are the consequences of climate change?

It's important to understand the difference between climate change effects and impacts. There are two types of effects: changes in average temperatures and increased extreme weather events like droughts and floods. These effects impact our lives in various ways. For example, a region that gets less rain than usual in a year could experience drought and see changes to activities like agriculture and hydroelectric power generation. It could also have more extreme storms, causing floods, landslides, and damage to urban and transportation infrastructure such as bridge collapses. These impacts extend to local economies. For example, declining coral reefs and beach area in coastal regions affect incomes and employment in the local tourism sector. According to UN estimates, climate change could force some 216 million people to move elsewhere within their own countries by 2050.

Latin America and the Caribbean



2020 was one of the region's three warmest years on record, at 1.0 °C above the average for the 1981–2010 period.



2020 became the most active fire year in the southern Amazon.



Countries in Latin America and the Caribbean lost the equivalent of 1.7% of annual GDP due to climate-related disasters, and up to 5.8 million people could be pushed into extreme poverty in the region by 2030 (World Bank Report, 2022).



The physical impacts on Latin America and the Caribbean of a 2 °C increase above pre-industrial levels would cause an estimated US\$100 billion in damage by 2050.

How can we reduce climate change?

The relevant term here is **mitigation**. Mitigation means both reducing our greenhouse gas emissions—particularly CO₂ and methane—and increasing our capacity to absorb them by radically transforming our energy, transportation, and agricultural sectors, as well as changing how we use land. The five pillars of mitigating climate change are:

1

Change the energy system and decarbonize electricity generation.

Today, 62% of new power plants built worldwide produce renewable energy. This trend must be further accelerated.

2

Use carbon-free electricity whenever possible.

This includes using this type of electricity for transportation, heating, cooking, and industrial processes.

3

Improve public transport systems.

4

Stop deforestation and increase reforestation with native species.

5

Reduce waste and improve efficiency in the energy and food sectors.

This involves switching to low-carbon materials (such as wood instead of concrete for construction) and low-carbon diets (for example, eating less meat). However, we need less waste and more efficiency in all sectors.

Successful adaptation requires infrastructure and public policy that incorporate the risks posed by climate change at the planning and design stages.

What can we do to reduce the impacts of climate change?

The answer is **adaptation**. Climate change makes natural disasters more frequent and so increases their threat. Adapting to climate change means taking steps to reduce both our vulnerability to natural disasters—by, for example, improving infrastructure to better withstand the impact of disasters—and exposure to them—by creating early warning systems and immediate response mechanisms, among other actions. Successful adaptation requires infrastructure and public policy that incorporate the risks posed by climate change at the planning and design stages.



What are climate negotiations and why do they matter?

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)—the treaty countries signed to jointly address the climate crisis—entered into force in 1994. The objective of the Convention is to stabilize GHG concentrations “at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system,” which affects all people worldwide and therefore requires global action. With 196 countries and the European Union participating in these multilateral negotiations, the Convention has near-universal membership.

Representatives of these countries meet periodically to negotiate and decide on actions. But the two most important annual UNFCCC events are the midyear “intersessional” conferences held in Bonn, Germany—where the UNFCCC is headquartered—and the Conference of the Parties (COPs) held towards the end of the year in different countries. The media often refers to COPs as climate summits.

What is the IPCC?

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is the UN body of experts that assesses the science related to climate change every five years, which it summarizes in reports on the scientific basis of climate change, its impacts and future risks, and options for adaptation and mitigation. These reports evaluate the state of knowledge on topics related to climate change and break down the information to make it useful for politicians and policymakers. The reports can be downloaded at [this link](#) and are available in the official UN languages. In 2007, the IPCC was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for its work on climate change.

The Conference of the Parties (COP) is an important annual climate event that the media often refers to as a climate summit.

What is the Paris Agreement?

The Paris Agreement is a treaty on climate change signed by all UNFCCC member states at the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP21) held in Paris, France. The objectives of the agreement are to: 1) limit the global temperature increase in this century to well below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels and to below 1.5 degrees Celsius if possible; 2) reduce the vulnerability and strengthen the resilience of all countries and their communities to climate change; and 3) ensure that financial flows are consistent with the first two objectives.

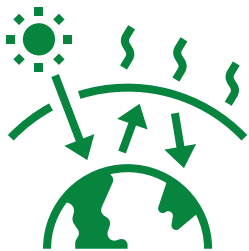
The Paris Agreement puts the world on the path to carbon neutrality by 2050. In other words, by mid-century, all countries must achieve net-zero emissions, either by eliminating or offsetting all GHG emissions.

What are NDCs?

Under the Paris Agreement, countries set their own GHG reduction targets and freely choose the mitigation and adaptation actions they will take to reach them. Their short-term action plans, called nationally determined contributions (NDCs), are updated every five years and are expected to demonstrate increasing ambition. Many countries have also made long-term commitments to reduce emissions or achieve net-zero emissions by 2050.

What are climate policies?

There are two types of climate policies. One is national climate policies, which include long-term strategies, NDCs, national adaptation and mitigation plans, and financing and investment plans. The other is policies for specific sectors, like transportation, agriculture, and energy, which must align with national policies.



Main greenhouse gases (GHGs):

Carbon dioxide (CO₂). We generate this gas when we burn fuel, for example.

Methane (CH₄). Methane is produced through the anaerobic decomposition of plants, among other processes.

Nitrous oxide (N₂O). Mineral fertilizers in the soil form this gas.

Hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs). HFCs are synthetic substances primarily composed of hydrogen and fluorine molecules.

Perfluorocarbons (PFCs). PFCs are used, for example, in refrigeration equipment, for cleaning, and in fire extinguishers.

Sulfur hexafluoride (SF₆). This gas is often used to insulate equipment in the electrical power industry and is also used in some steel manufacturing processes.



***HOW TO CREATE
EFFECTIVE NARRATIVES
ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE***



Climate change can be an intimidating topic for audiences, as it requires people to take in new technical concepts and can fuel an overwhelming sense of doom and anxiety. For this reason, crafting effective narratives and telling engaging stories is one of the main goals of climate journalism. The following strategies can help us shape such stories:



Frame climate action as an opportunity.

Many of the solutions that experts have proposed to mitigate climate change are directly tied to people's quality of life and well-being. For example, if we embrace sustainable mobility through actions like cycling and walking more, we will save money on fossil fuels and reap health benefits. Angles like these can be used to create appealing journalistic content. Another example would be investigating the impact of a new bike lane network on hospital care, obesity, and diabetes statistics. Journalists could also focus on how decarbonization policies affect job creation, highlighting opportunities for young people who will soon enter the workforce. The growing demand for specialized technicians as solar panel installation becomes more popular is one example. Through perspectives like these, we can produce news stories that both inform audiences about the importance of mitigating climate change and generate positive reactions.



Avoid thinking of climate change as a purely environmental issue.

Climate change is our new reality, one with ramifications for society, politics, economics, law, culture, and even sports. This means we shouldn't restrict our climate coverage to the environment and science pages—we should keep our eyes open for compelling stories for all kinds of audiences. Climate change can even be included in sports coverage. Could hotter and more frequent heat waves result in soccer matches being rescheduled or moved indoors in warmer countries? How would that affect players? Or, for example, should golf courses continue to be irrigated with drinking water?



Choose everyday topics that hit close to home.

Finding angles that resonate with our audiences will help us boost interest in climate journalism.

When it comes to communicating abstract concepts, the more specific we can make our stories, the better. To continue with the example of climate change's impact on sports, how does global warming affect marathon runners? How does worsening air quality due to the burning of fossil fuels affect cyclists? Or you could delve into what motherhood looks like in a world with a changing climate. Have researchers found any impacts of rising temperatures on pregnancy? More broadly, what toll is the climate crisis taking on our mental health?



Seek out local spokespersons, sources, and issues.

A great deal of climate information comes from the United States and Europe and is in English.

While this information is undoubtedly valuable for our work, we can complement it with sources from our own backyard. When we talk about climate change in Spanish and cite locally relevant spokespersons, data, and topics, we make it easier for our audiences to care about and identify with these stories. This also helps make our coverage more diverse. It is crucial that we not lose sight of the human impact of this issue and its current and future effects on countless lives. Environmental journalism plays a social role and should give voice to the many actors necessary to bring about a just transition.



Prioritize positive stories and calls to action.

To make climate change less overwhelming, journalists can use success stories to shine a light on people who are creating and implementing solutions. These profiles can highlight the actions people are taking, the lessons they learned along the way, and the solutions that our audiences can adopt as well. Such stories are useful because many media consumers want to stop feeling powerless about climate change and are looking for ways to fight it.



Keep expectations in check.

The complex nature of climate change means that the results of any actions taken—both locally and globally, individually and collectively—will not be immediate, which can lead to frustration.

We must be clear that mitigation and adaptation will take time. Still, we can emphasize how valuable and important these actions are and build hope for future generations.



***HOW TO APPROACH
CLIMATE CHANGE
IN THE NEWSROOM***



According to the [Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2022](#), a collaboration between the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism and Oxford University, data from six continents and 46 markets reveals that trust in the news has fallen in almost half of the countries surveyed and risen in just seven. Meanwhile, the proportion of people who say they avoid the news has increased sharply across all countries. In addition to these general problems affecting the news media, climate change news has its own particular challenges, including that of ensuring that the topic has an important place in newsrooms.

Wolfgang Blau, co-founder of the Oxford Climate Journalism Network, [examined some of the hurdles faced by climate journalists](#). These include a lack of knowledge about climate change in newsrooms, audiences' lack of knowledge about climate change, the broad spectrum of audience attitudes towards the crisis—from complete denial to alarm—and the lack of an organizational structure for climate change coverage.

Below are some possible solutions to overcome these barriers:

Increase climate literacy in newsrooms.

Climate change is increasingly relevant to economics, politics, health, and many other aspects of our daily lives, so climate literacy is important for all newsroom staff, not just journalists covering climate change. One way to increase climate literacy among other staff is to have specialized journalists share their knowledge, both in formal and informal interactions. For example, journalists from different sections could meet once a month to discuss climate change. There also several useful courses and trainings available, many of which are offered by international or regional networks of climate journalists.

Trust in the news has fallen in almost half of the countries surveyed and risen in just seven.





Understand your audience's relationship to climate change.

Knowing our audience better is a must if we are to win back their trust in the news media and address the wide range of attitudes towards climate change. Breaking down how informed people are about the topic and what their attitudes are can be helpful, and interactive tools like surveys and quizzes are one way to obtain this information. There's no need for complicated technology—we can even use survey tools on social media to learn about our followers. Once we have a better idea of our audience's background, we can identify topics worth exploring in greater depth and detail. This information can also help editors decide how to prioritize climate change content.

Segment audiences to create tailored content.

In addition to researching how much our audiences know about climate change, we can divide them into target segments based on shared attitudes. Once again, this allows us to effectively and strategically allocate the newsroom resources for climate coverage. This [Yale Program on Climate Change Communication survey](#) can be a valuable tool for measuring public opinion about climate change. Once we have our audience's segmentation results, we can determine what types of content will connect most with each subgroup. For example, those who are most alarmed may prefer content about actions they can take to mitigate climate change. Those who are still doubtful about climate change, however, may gravitate to content that presents scientific evidence.

Climate change news has its own particular challenges, including that of ensuring that the topic has an important place in newsrooms.



Figure out the best structure for your newsroom.

The best structure for expanding climate coverage depends on the media outlet's characteristics and available resources. Some newsrooms choose to create a whole new climate desk, while others find it more effective to expand the current environment, energy, or science desks. No matter which approach is taken, newsrooms must make sure that editors from all their content verticals are knowledgeable about climate change and include it in their coverage. Another possible strategy is hiring a specialist to collaborate with all teams and help them create climate stories for their respective sections.



Build networks and community.

It can often be lonely to be a climate journalist in a newsroom, and having to constantly push for expanded climate coverage can be a heavy load to carry. To combat isolation, climate journalists can join climate journalism networks to connect with peers working in other newsrooms. In these spaces, professionals can discuss how to talk to editors and colleagues, find new angles, and increase climate content in other sections.



Some organizations that bring together climate journalists are:

LatinClima, Periodistas Ambientales, Fundación Gabo, Oxford Climate Journalism Network, Asociación de Periodistas de Información Ambiental (Spain), Climate Tracker, Periodistas por el Planeta (PxP) and Agencia EFE/EFE VERDE.

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HOW TO COVER
CLIMATE NEGOTIATION EVENTS



Climate negotiations like COPs are events where different levels of government, countries, and international organizations coordinate their public policies to address climate change. Covering these events in a way that is engaging and accessible for diverse audiences can be tricky, especially when it's a journalist's first time. Here are a few tips on how to do it:



Do your homework.

Climate negotiations can be highly technical affairs, with very political and involved aspects.

Even if you will not be covering everything that happens at an event, it's important to understand the bigger picture so you can choose what to focus on. This allows you to craft clear and effective narratives for audiences. The more you understand, the better you can communicate technical and scientific ideas in simple terms.

Covering these events in a way that is engaging and accessible for diverse audiences can be tricky.



Prepare your audience as well.

Even before negotiations begin, you can start explaining the underlying technical issues to your audience. If you know what a conference's core issues will be ahead of time, you can create content to introduce them in advance, helping prepare your audience to follow the event with more ease. Once you begin coverage of the event itself, these explainer pieces can be linked to give context.



Reach out to sources in advance.

Consider contacting country delegations, political sources, scientific organizations, as well as non-governmental organizations—which often have observer status at climate negotiations—to start building relationships and trust.



Be selective about what you cover.

You'll find it difficult to cover everything that happens at climate negotiations and downright impossible at the more complex ones, such as the COP. So make sure you decide in advance what to focus your time and resources on, while also leaving some flexibility for unexpected stories that emerge. The topics you choose to cover will mainly depend on your media outlet, its focus, whether you work in specialized or generalist content, and your audience and where they are located. For example, the audience of a business periodical would expect to learn about the financial aspects of negotiations.



Make the most of your expertise.

Our colleagues from other desks often cover the more high-profile aspects of negotiations, such as speeches given by world leaders and special guests. This frees us up to concentrate our coverage on what we climate journalists understand best: the negotiations themselves.



The more you understand, the better you can communicate technical and scientific ideas in simple terms.



Mix it up with different formats for different content.

Whether we're producing text, video, or graphics, not all content needs the same level of depth. Opt for short, dynamic formats to summarize each day's progress and longer formats when giving context and analysis.



Practice collaborative journalism.

Journalists who are on the scene and journalists working remotely are in a position to support each other. While on-site journalists are extremely busy and have little time to process information and write and edit long articles, journalists working remotely depend on the raw material from their colleagues attending in person. By coordinating in advance, both sides can benefit from these synergies.



It is possible to cover negotiations remotely.

The reality is that we can't always be on the ground to cover climate negotiations, but we can do so remotely as long as we understand the limitations. Even if you don't attend in person, you can still conduct preliminary interviews with specialists, build a list of contacts who will be on site and willing to talk to you during the negotiations—and who can fill you in on what's taking place behind the scenes—and create content that puts the events in context. Also, some events, like the COP plenary sessions, are broadcast live.



Keep an eye out for stories outside the event.

Agreements and technical discussions will make up the bulk of your coverage, but there are also newsworthy stories in the broader context of summits and conventions. To find them, pay attention to the people around you both inside and outside the conference, like those participating in the demonstrations that sometimes occur. This content can come in handy for slower news days, such as weekends.

05

***HOW TO USE SOCIAL MEDIA
TO CONNECT WITH
OLD AND NEW AUDIENCES***



The rise of social media radically changed the relationship between audiences and information. At times, the way social media divides our attention and the importance it gives likes and follower counts can seem like the enemy of meaningful, thoughtful journalism. But without question, social media also opens up new opportunities for journalists. Here are some ways to make the most of these platforms:

Share your articles.

Social media content often doesn't directly compete with other formats—it tends to complement them instead. For example, you can use social media to drive traffic to your articles by sharing links. Instead of just posting the link, create valuable content with the right format and voice for different platforms that encourages people to click on your article to learn more.



Use social media during the research stage.

Instagram Stories and Twitter are great for interacting with your audience. For example, when working on content like longer articles or newsletters, you can ask your followers what aspects of the topic they'd like to see covered in greater depth. You can also use these spaces to learn valuable information about your audience, their interests, and their level of knowledge about climate change that will help you better engage and connect with them.

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Strengthen your identity as a climate journalist.

Using channels like personal newsletters, Instagram Stories, and Twitter, you can craft messages in your own unique voice. By allowing you to be more personal and informal and even share your opinions, these outlets provide another way to boost audience engagement.

Show the human side of journalism.

Social media lets us take our audience behind the scenes and put a human face on our stories, which can help build trust.



Tap into the power of audiovisual.

The interactive nature of social media rewards stories featuring audiovisual content. By sharing videos, photographs, and infographics, we can help take our rigorously researched climate journalism to new audiences.

USEFUL SOURCES:

- » United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)
- » The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)
- » The Food and Agriculture Organization Corporate Statistical Database (FAOSTAT)
- » Aqueduct Global Flood Risk Country Rankings
- » Directory of FAO indicators on water, the environment, and health (AQUASTAT)
- » Climate Watch
- » Status of and progress on NDC in Latin America and the Caribbean [in Spanish]
- » Sustainable Development Goals global indicators database
- » World Environment Situation Room
- » World Bank Climate Change Knowledge Portal
- » Our World in Data
- » The environment and public health (Pan American Health Organization)
- » International Energy Agency (IEA)
- » Data and Statistics from the International Energy Agency
- » International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA)
- » Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA)



CLIMATE-FOCUSED MEDIA OUTLETS:










- » EFE: VERDE
- » Mongabay (Latam)
- » El Surtidor (Paraguay)
- » Ojo al Clima (Costa Rica)
- » Diálogo Chino (Latam)
- » Red/Acción
- » Sala de Prensa Ambiental (Argentina)
- » Dos Ambientes (Argentina)
- » LatFem (Latam)
- » La Data Cuenta (Costa Rica)
- » Ecociencia GT (Guatemala)
- » Gato Encerrado (El Salvador)
- » Concolón (Panama)

OTHER LINKS OF INTEREST:

- » Periodistas por el Planeta
- » Climate Tracker Latam
- » Fundación Gabo
- » Center for Climate Change Communication
- » Reuters Institute Report
- » How people access news about climate change

The IDB and climate change

Climate change has a profound effect on the lives and economic fortunes of people in Latin America and the Caribbean. It is also an opportunity for development for the region's countries. A study conducted by the IDB and the International Labour Organization found that reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 35% will create 15 million net jobs by 2030. Climate change is therefore a pillar of the IDB's work in the region and is incorporated into all of its projects. For example:

-  The IDB Group provided **\$6 billion in climate financing in 2021**.
-  **It is helping 14 countries develop and implement** their long-term climate strategies and NDCs.
-  More than half the resources mobilized by **IDB Invest** are for climate investments.
-  The IDB's **Green Bond Transparency Platform** now covers 80% of the growing green bond market in Latin America and the Caribbean.
-  **The IDB mobilized \$2.6 billion in contingent credit** facilities for disaster response.
-  **The IDB evaluates all new operations to ensure they align with the Paris Agreement.**
-  **The IDB allocated \$300 million for its Amazon Initiative.**
-  It created the **first climate change platform** for ministries of finance
-  **Multi-lateral banks contributed \$51 billion** in climate financing to low and middle income economies.

IDB Resources

- » How Much Will it Cost to Achieve the Climate Goals in Latin America and the Caribbean?
- » Climate Policies in Latin America and the Caribbean: Success Stories and Challenges in the Fight against Climate Change
- » Achieving Net-Zero Prosperity: How Governments Can Unlock 15 Essential Transformations
- » Inter-American Development Bank: Sustainability Report 2021
- » Nature-based Solutions in Latin America and the Caribbean: Financing Mechanisms for Regional Replication

You can find more information at these links:

- » IDB PUBLICATIONS ON CLIMATE CHANGE
- » IDB SUSTAINABILITY BLOG



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