

Supporting a Pathway for Inquiry, Restraint, and Legitimate Future Choice: A “Middle Path” for Solar Radiation Modification (SRM) Research and Governance



Climate change is no longer a distant threat, and ongoing efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and strengthen adaptation are insufficient to prevent increasingly severe warming.

For many communities across Least Developed Countries, Small Island Developing States, mountain ecosystems, and the Arctic, climate change is a present-day crisis with a terrible human cost.

And as climate risks intensify, interest is increasing to consider additional response strategies, including a set of potential interventions known as Solar Radiation Modification (SRM). A substantial research literature suggests SRM approaches could reduce global mean temperatures, but with extensive unresolved questions spanning physical impacts, governance, ethics, accountability, and consent. In some versions of SRM, the effects would be planet-wide and potentially generational. Strategies could also be deployed by a narrow set of actors under conditions of urgency, uncertainty, or inadequate oversight.

The prospect of decisions with such far-reaching consequences raises a fundamental question: not primarily whether SRM should ultimately be used or not, but how to preserve the ability to make legitimate choices in the future as knowledge evolves, risks emerge, and political conditions change. Who is at the table? What knowledge is needed? And what safeguards are required to ensure that future choices are made responsibly?

Whatever the future holds, the best preparation in this context is governance that is sufficient to the task and inclusive of the voices most affected by its outcomes. This requires wider engagement across civil society, especially from regions and communities most exposed to climate risks. We formed the Middle Path Initiative to help meet this challenge.

“Whatever the future holds, the best preparation in this context is governance that is sufficient to the task and inclusive of the voices most affected by its outcomes.”

We are a geographically diverse group of civil society organizations including from climate-vulnerable regions. We work across issues in climate change, environmental protection, public health, adaptation, and sustainable development, with members based in Africa, Latin America, South Asia, the Arctic, and North America.

We believe wider civil-society participation in these questions is important, and that the path forward is one built on inclusive inquiry, restraint, and legitimate future choice. We refer to this as a *middle path*, combining strong restraint on deployment with responsible research governance, meaningful participation by climate-vulnerable countries and communities, and safeguards against unilateral or poorly governed action.



The Middle Path Initiative's White Paper outlines our approach and identifies practical steps that governments, researchers, civil society organizations, and funders can take to put this approach into practice. It is intended to help

bring a wider range of voices into a conversation that has often been shaped by a relatively narrow set of institutions and countries. We are not alone in this effort, and we seek to collaborate and support others who share the same goal.

Our approach is grounded in the following principles:

Foundational principles

Human rights and justice should be at the core of all SRM research and governance decisions, and maintain a strong commitment to mitigation, adaptation, and the broader climate response.

Building Legitimacy and Trust in SRM Research

SRM should be treated as a public good under responsible governance. This includes strong inclusion, participation, and the right to shape specific agendas; as well as transparency and accountability.

Robust Governance

Under current conditions of scientific uncertainty, insufficient governance capacity, and limited international legitimacy, SRM should not be deployed. Governance of any SRM activities should be proportionate to the risk and ethical, legal, and human consequences of the activity.

Participation in the Initiative does not require taking a position for or against possible future SRM deployment; it reflects agreement that deployment should not occur under current conditions, that inquiry should not be prematurely foreclosed, and that future choices should be made through legitimate and inclusive processes. The future of SRM should not be determined by those with the greatest resources or loudest voices alone. It should be shaped through processes worthy of the people who will live with the consequences.

Sanot Adhikari, *Youth Alliance for Environment (Nepal)*

Ann Irungu, *African Research Impact Network (Kenya)*

Roberto Kishinami and Kai Uwe Barani Schmidt,
Instituto Clima e Sociedade (Brazil)

Justus Lehtisaari, *Operaatio Arktis (Finland)*

Ernest Ofori, *Emerging Climate Frontiers (Ghana)*

Rituraj Phukan, *Healthy Climate Initiative (India)*

Natasha Vidangos, *Environmental Defense Fund (USA)*

To learn more about the Initiative, view the White Paper, or join us in endorsing the approach, visit us at: <https://middlepath.global>