

Regional environmental agreements are over twice as likely to be authorised than global agreements

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Regionally-focused environmental agreements are two and a half times more likely to be ratified than globally-focused environmental agreements, according to new research by Durham University Business School.

The researchers also found that environmental lobbying positively affects countries participation in environmental agreements, while the effect of industrial lobbying is statistically insignificant.

The study, conducted by Dr. Francesco Bellelli for his Ph.D. thesis in Economics at Durham University Business School, under the supervision of Professor Riccardo Scarpa and Associate Professor Ashar Aftab, explored the determinants of countries participation in environmental international agreements, with a special focus on lobbying and regional agreements.

The researchers assembled the most complete dataset to date comprising 263 multilateral environmental agreements and 198 countries between 1950 and 2017. From this, the researchers identified the potential ratifiers for each agreement.

The results revealed that regional treaties could be an effective tool for solving environmental issues because they can more easily engage small groups of countries in action. On the contrary, the negotiation of global agreements requires finding a compromise among many nations, which could end up penalising participation in the agreement or hindering its environmental effectiveness.

The researchers also found that the probability of ratification decreases over time, being at its highest during the first three years since the initial agreement and decreasing quickly after five years. Because of this, symbolic ratifications by big players are most effective in the early stages of the agreement, in helping to encourage progress/change.

“Whether it is air pollution, global warming, biodiversity loss or deforestation, most environment-related challenges cross national borders and simultaneously affect several nations – that is why international cooperation is required to solve some of the most severe environmental problems of our times.”, says Professor Scarpa.

“Our research clearly shows that regional agreements are more likely to tackle the challenges that the world faces, whereas global agreements risk alienating particular countries, and potentially limiting the targets pursued in the agreements, meaning key environmental challenges are less effectively tackled.”

The researchers believe these findings offer novel insights to policymakers on the most effective ways to expand countries' participation in tackling environmental challenges. Local, regional partnerships, though smaller, can generate greater commitment and overall success rate, in a shorter period of time.

If you would be interested in receiving the full research paper, or speaking with Prof Scarpa, please contact Peter Remon at BlueSky Education – peter@bluesky-pr.com +44 (0) 77 235 228 30.