

SDG 13 as Discursive Container: Technocratic and Relational Climate Futures in Indonesia and Ecuador at COP21

El ODS 13 como contenedor discursivo: futuros climáticos tecnocráticos y relacionales en Indonesia y Ecuador en la COP21

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Abstract

Climate change governance is increasingly structured through global frameworks such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 13 (Climate Action), which standardize climate action through targets and indicators while allowing discursive variation in how climate futures are imagined. This article examines the discursive construction of climate futures in tropical state climate communication by comparing head-of-state national statements delivered at the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP21), the summit that culminated in the Paris Agreement. Using qualitative comparative discourse analysis (Witajewska-Baltvilka et al., 2024), the study analyzes speeches by the Presidents of Indonesia and Ecuador and introduces two analytical heuristics—technocratic climate language and relational ecological climate language—developed in this study to distinguish contrasting modes of climate discourse. The findings show that Indonesia's COP21 speech predominantly frames climate futures through technocratic language emphasizing governance capacity and policy implementation, while Ecuador's speech articulates relational ecological futures grounded in moral responsibility and intergenerational justice. The article argues that SDG 13 functions as a discursive container whose later institutional form crystallized climate imaginaries articulated at COP21, demonstrating that climate futures are actively produced through language.

Keywords: climate discourse, SDG 13, technocracy, relational ecology, tropics, COP21, Paris Agreement.

Resumen

Este estudio analiza la arquitectura de la gobernanza climática global, centrada en el Objetivo de Desarrollo Sostenible (ODS) 13 de Acción por el Clima de las Naciones Unidas, como un marco que normaliza la acción institucional mediante metas e indicadores, permitiendo simultáneamente diversas trayectorias discursivas. A través de un análisis comparativo cualitativo (Witajewska-Baltvilka et al., 2024) de las declaraciones en la Conferencia de las Naciones Unidas sobre el Cambio Climático de 2015, COP21, la investigación examina la construcción de futuros climáticos en los estados tropicales de Indonesia y Ecuador. Para ello, se proponen dos heurísticas analíticas: el lenguaje tecnocrático y el lenguaje ecológico relacional. Los hallazgos demuestran que, mientras Indonesia articula una visión tecnocrática enfocada en la implementación de políticas y capacidad estatal, Ecuador fundamenta su discurso en la justicia intergeneracional y la responsabilidad moral bajo una lógica ecológica relacional.

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En conclusión, el artículo conceptualiza el ODS 13 como un *contenedor discursivo* que cristaliza los imaginarios climáticos de COP21. El estudio subraya que los futuros climáticos no son entes dados, sino producciones performativas generadas mediante el discurso político en espacios multilaterales.

Palabras clave: discurso climático, ODS 13, tecnocracia, ecología relacional, trópicos, COP21, Acuerdo de París.

Introduction

Climate change refers to long-term changes in the Earth's climate system, including rising global temperatures, shifting precipitation patterns, and increasing frequency of extreme weather events. (IPCC, 2023) Climate change is commonly approached as a scientific, technical, and policy challenge requiring coordinated global action (Xie et al., 2025; Velazquez, 2025). Among these goals, SDG 13 (Climate Action) occupies a pivotal po, calling on states to integrate climate measures into national policies, enhance adaptive capacity, and mobilize financial, technological, and institutional resources to address climate-related risks (Rhouma et al., 2025).

SDG 13, “Climate Action,” seeks urgent action to address climate change and its impacts. It focuses on strengthening resilience and adaptive capacity (Target 13.1), integrating climate measures into national policies and planning (Target 13.2), enhancing climate-related education and institutional capacity (Target 13.3), and supporting finance and capacity-building for developing countries (Targets 13.a–13.b) (United Nations, 2015). These targets reflect a governance-oriented framework centered on planning, implementation, and institutional coordination. While SDG 13 provides a shared framework for action, it does not prescribe how climate change should be imagined, valued, or spoken about (Sadiq et al., 2025). Language shapes how climate change is framed, whether as a technical problem requiring managerial solutions, a moral crisis invoking ethical responsibility, or a relational disruption affecting long-standing connections between humans and the natural world (Sadiq et al., 2025).

This discursive dimension is particularly significant in tropical contexts. Tropical regions are disproportionately affected by climate impacts (Parmisana, 2024). At the same time, many tropical societies are shaped by colonial histories, postcolonial development trajectories, and enduring indigenous epistemologies that articulate human–environment relations in relational, moral, and cosmological terms (Parmisana, 2024). Climate change in the tropics is not merely a technical or environmental issue, but one that intersects with questions of historical injustice, cultural identity, and alternative ways of knowing and relating to nature (Haugen, 1972). Yet these dimensions are often less foregrounded when climate action is articulated primarily through global policy frameworks that emphasize technical expertise, quantitative indicators, and managerial rationalities (Penz & Fill, 2022).

Existing climate scholarship has largely concentrated on policy effectiveness, institutional capacity, governance arrangements, and mitigation or adaptation outcomes (Poddar, 2024). While this body of work has generated important insights into how climate action is organized and implemented, it has paid comparatively less attention to how climate futures are discursively constructed (Craciun et al., 2024). In particular, there remains a lack of research examining how states operating under the same global climate governance moment articulate divergent visions of the future through language (Witajewska-Baltvilka et al., 2024). Comparative studies frequently reproduce a Global North–Global South binary, thereby

obscuring variation within tropical regions and limiting attention to how tropical states actively negotiate, reinterpret, and contest climate narratives (Poddar, 2024).

This article addresses this gap by examining how climate futures were enunciated at a critical discursive moment in global climate governance: the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP21), which culminated in the Paris Agreement. Focusing on head-of-state national statements delivered at COP21, the study compares Indonesia and Ecuador, two tropical states participating in the same landmark climate summit yet articulating different climate imaginaries. Indonesia has generally approached climate change through state-led governance mechanisms emphasizing forest management, emissions reduction commitments, institutional coordination, and climate policy integration. Ecuador, by contrast, has been associated with relational ecological approaches, including the constitutional recognition of the Rights of Nature and the influence of *Buen Vivir* (*Sumak Kawsay*) principles in environmental discourse. These contrasting domestic orientations make the two countries analytically useful cases for examining how different climate imaginaries are articulated within the same global governance setting. In this study, SDG 13 is treated not as a causal driver of these discourses, but as an analytical lens through which earlier articulations of climate futures can be interpreted. This approach makes it possible to examine how discursive formations at COP21 anticipate, align with, or diverge from the governance logics later institutionalized in SDG 13, without assuming that the actors themselves were oriented toward the goal at the time. Rather than treating SDG 13 as a purely technical policy instrument, the article therefore approaches it analytically as a discursive container whose later institutional form crystallized climate imaginaries first articulated at COP21. The central argument advanced here is that, although SDG 13 is structurally technocratic in design, its meaning is discursively negotiated through contrasting linguistic regimes.

Methods

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative comparative discourse analysis to examine how climate futures are constructed through language in official head-of-state climate communication (Witajewska-Baltvilka et al., 2024). In this sense, climate discourse is understood not merely as a vehicle for conveying information, but as a site in which particular understandings of the future are rendered intelligible, legitimate, and authoritative at moments of global political significance (Cirne & Efken, 2023). The research follows an interpretive qualitative design that combines close textual analysis with systematic comparison. By focusing on head-of-state national statements delivered at COP21 by Indonesia and Ecuador, the study examines how distinct climate imaginaries emerged within the same summit that culminated in the Paris Agreement (Bayraktar et al., 2024).

The comparative design is structured around two analytically defined discursive regimes, technocratic climate language and relational ecological climate language, developed as heuristic tools for interpreting patterns in the data. These regimes allow a systematic examination of how climate futures articulated at COP21 were later institutionalized in global frameworks such as SDG 13 (Anta-Félez et al., 2024). The research design prioritizes interpretive rigor and conceptual clarity over statistical generalization. The analysis focuses on thematic patterns and recurrent linguistic features, including nominalization, modality, agency

representation, and evaluative vocabulary, which informed the coding protocol outlined in Table 1.

Data Sources

The primary data for this study consist of national statements delivered by heads of state during the Leaders' Event of the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP21), held in Paris (President of Republic of Indonesia, 2015; President of Republic of Ecuador, 2015). Two cases were selected for comparative analysis: Indonesia and Ecuador. Indonesia is represented by the national statement delivered by Joko Widodo, President of the Republic of Indonesia, at the COP21 Leaders' Event. Ecuador is represented by the national statement delivered by Rafael Correa, President of the Republic of Ecuador, during the same event. In both cases, the speeches function as authoritative expressions of state climate discourse, carrying the symbolic and political authority of the head of state rather than reflecting ministerial, technical, or partisan positions. Unlike technical submissions or policy reports, Leaders' Event statements are explicitly rhetorical and future-oriented, making them particularly suitable for examining how climate futures are publicly articulated at the intersection of national identity and global governance.

The selection of Indonesia and Ecuador is analytically strategic rather than representative in a statistical sense. Both countries are located in tropical regions and participated in the same landmark climate summit, yet they differ markedly in political economy, governance traditions, and ecological worldviews. Indonesia represents a state-led, development-oriented approach to climate governance articulated through technocratic rationalities, while Ecuador is widely associated with relational ecological framings grounded in constitutional recognition of the rights of nature and the prominence of indigenous epistemologies in national discourse, particularly *Sumak Kawsay* (*Buen Vivir*), an Andean worldview that emphasizes collective well-being and harmonious relationships between humans and nature. This contrast is employed as an analytical design to examine how divergent climate imaginaries can emerge within the same institutional and historical moment, rather than to claim representativeness or generalizability beyond the cases analyzed.

The Indonesian speech consists of 635 words³, while the Ecuadorian speech consists of 3,754 words⁴. Although the speeches differ substantially in length, the study employs qualitative comparative discourse analysis rather than quantitative frequency analysis. The analysis therefore focuses on dominant discursive constructions, rhetorical strategies, and thematic orientations rather than numerical comparisons across equivalent corpora. Both texts were retrieved from official United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP21) records and are publicly accessible. All texts were analyzed in their official English versions as published by the UNFCCC, without modification.

³ Indonesia (President of the Republic of Indonesia, 2015):

https://unfccc.int/files/meetings/paris_nov_2015/application/pdf/cop21cmp11_hls_speech_indonesia.pdf

⁴ Ecuador (President of the Republic of Ecuador, 2015):

https://unfccc.int/files/meetings/paris_nov_2015/application/pdf/cop21cmp11_leaders_event_ecuador_en.pdf

Analytical Framework

This study adopts a discourse-analytic framework that treats climate change not only as a material and policy challenge, but also as a domain of meaning-making in which futures are linguistically produced, ordered, and authorized (Anta-Félez et al., 2024; Beck & Ritter, 1992). Rather than assuming that climate governance is driven solely by technical rationality or institutional design, the analysis approaches climate discourse as a constitutive practice through which political authority, moral responsibility, and temporal orientation are articulated (Poorghorban, 2023). The study introduces two analytical heuristics—technocratic climate language and relational ecological climate language—to examine how climate futures were framed at COP21 and later institutionalized in global frameworks such as SDG 13.

Technocratic climate language refers to modes of climate discourse that frame climate change primarily as a problem of governance and management (de Kleyn et al., 2025; Dryzek, 1995). This framing aligns with what John Dryzek describes as administrative rationalism in environmental discourse, where environmental problems are addressed through institutional expertise and policy coordination. The future is typically imagined as a governable trajectory, one that can be planned, measured, and delivered through effective administration and technical intervention. This form of language is closely aligned with dominant models of global climate governance that later became formalized in the architecture of the SDGs, including SDG 13, where progress is assessed through indicators, timelines, and performance benchmarks.

Relational ecological climate language, by contrast, frames climate change as a disruption of relationships that bind humans, non-human entities, and future generations (de Haas & Westerink, 2026; Latour, 2005). The environment is not treated merely as a system or resource, but as a living relation embedded in social, cultural, and often indigenous epistemologies (Darnell, 2025; Escobar, 2011, 2022). Authority in this mode of discourse is grounded less in technical expertise than in ethical claims, collective memory, and relational accountability. These two forms of climate language are used as analytical heuristics rather than mutually exclusive categories and serve to identify dominant discursive orientations in the data. The two heuristics are used as analytical tools rather than evaluative categories, making visible differences in discursive orientation without presuming that one mode of climate language is inherently more effective or desirable than the other.

Central to this framework is the conceptualization of climate futures as discursive constructions. Rather than treating the future as a fixed outcome or objective endpoint, the analysis understands climate futures as temporally oriented narratives that shape present action by defining what is desirable, necessary, or inevitable (Beck & Ritter, 1992; Escobar, 2011). In technocratic climate language, the future is oriented toward planning horizons, policy milestones, and deliverable outcomes (Beck & Ritter, 1992). In relational ecological climate language, the future is oriented toward moral continuity, ecological balance, and responsibility to future generations (Escobar, 2011). These differing temporal, moral, and political orientations are consequential, as they delimit the range of actions, values, and forms of agency that are rendered legitimate within climate governance.

Coding Protocol

The analysis employs a systematic coding protocol to operationalize the analytical framework and ensure transparency in data interpretation. Coding was conducted at the sentence level and extended to paragraphs when meaning was distributed across multiple sentences. Two primary

code families were developed to reflect the study's central analytical heuristics. The first code family captures instances of technocratic climate language, coding segments that frame climate change in terms of governance, management, or technical intervention. This included references to policy instruments, institutional arrangements, quantified commitments, implementation mechanisms, scientific or technical expertise, risk management, and administrative capacity (Anta-Félez et al., 2024; Beck & Ritter, 1992). In the Indonesian speech, examples included references to strengthened forest governance, enhanced law enforcement, ecosystem restoration, and participation in the ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution, all of which framed climate action through institutional coordination and policy implementation.

Table 1. Coding Framework

Code Family	Linguistic Features	Examples
Technocratic Climate Language	Nominalization, policy vocabulary, institutional references, implementation language, modality expressing obligation ("must"), governance terminology	implementation, coordination, governance, enforcement, capacity-building
Relational Ecological Climate Language	Evaluative vocabulary, moral obligation, relational references, stewardship language, intergenerational orientation, ecological personification	care, responsibility, protection, inheritance, rights of nature, future generations

Source: Own elaboration.

The second code family captures relational ecological climate language, coding segments that articulate climate change through moral responsibility, ethical obligation, or relationships between humans, non-human entities, and future generations (Darnell, 2025; Escobar, 2022). Particular attention was paid to language that framed nature as a living or relational presence rather than as an abstract system or resource, as well as to references invoking care, stewardship, protection, inheritance, or collective obligation. (Table 1) In the Ecuadorian speech, examples included references to the Rights of Nature, environmental debt, *Sumak Kawsay* (*Buen Vivir*), and the concluding invocation of St. Francis of Assisi, which collectively framed climate action through ethical responsibility, ecological interdependence, and moral stewardship. Mentions of indigenous peoples, ancestral knowledge, or local communities were coded within this category when they were used to foreground relational modes of understanding human–environment interaction rather than as instrumental stakeholders within policy or development frameworks.

The analysis did not assume that technocratic and relational ecological discourses are mutually exclusive. For example, Indonesia's references to ecosystem restoration combine governance-oriented intervention with concern for ecological preservation, while Ecuador's proposal for a Universal Declaration of the Rights of Nature combines institutional action with relational ecological values (Table 2). Coding allowed the identification of hybrid passages where technocratic governance language intersected with moral or relational framing. The relative prominence, discursive positioning, and narrative centrality of each code family within a given speech were then interpreted to assess which mode of climate language structured the overall construction of climate futures (Table 2).

Table 2. Illustrative Examples of Hybrid Discursive Coding

Extract	Technocratic Element	Relational Element
Indonesia: "Enhanced law enforcement, strengthened forest governance, and ecosystem restoration..."	Governance, implementation, institutional intervention	Ecosystem protection
Ecuador: "We must go even further and draft a Universal Declaration of the Rights of Nature..."	Legal/institutional proposal	Nature as a moral subject with rights

Source: Own elaboration.

SDG 13 is used retrospectively as an analytical lens for interpreting COP21 climate discourse. To enhance analytical consistency, coding was conducted iteratively, with initial readings used to refine code definitions and subsequent readings used to apply them systematically across the data set. Interpretive decisions were guided by the theoretical framework rather than by frequency counts, emphasizing qualitative significance, discursive positioning, and narrative function. Analytical validity was ensured through iterative reading, theoretical saturation of codes, and cross-checking interpretations against the study's conceptual framework rather than frequency counts.

Results

Indonesia: Technocratic Climate Futures at COP21

Indonesia's national statement delivered at the Leaders' Event of COP21 constructs climate futures predominantly through technocratic climate language. Speaking on behalf of the state, Joko Widodo frames climate change primarily as a governance and development challenge addressed through policy coordination, institutional capacity, and state-led implementation, positioning the state as the central agent of climate action. Linguistically, this orientation is reflected in the frequent use of nominalized forms such as "implementation," "coordination," and "enhancement," which background human agency and present climate action as an administratively structured process. For instance, the statement refers to "enhanced law enforcement, strengthened forest governance, and ecosystem restoration" (p. 3), where action is expressed through nominalized forms rather than agentive verbs.

In his COP21 statement, President Joko Widodo emphasizes that the Paris Agreement "must be legally binding, ambitious, durable, [and] take into account national priorities and capabilities," foregrounding climate action as a matter of governance architecture rather than moral obligation. The use of modal expressions such as "must" signals obligation within an institutional and regulatory register, while the clustering of abstract evaluative terms, "binding," "durable," and "capabilities", constructs climate responsibility in terms of formal design criteria rather than relational or ethical commitments. The emphasis on bindingness, durability, and national capacity situates climate futures within a framework of institutional feasibility and administrative control, where effectiveness is measured through compliance, implementation, and alignment with national systems.

President Joko Widodo highlights "enhanced law enforcement, strengthened forest governance, and ecosystem restoration" as key national responses. These expressions rely on

nominalization (“enforcement,” “governance,” “restoration”), framing climate action as an administrative process. Communities and ecosystems appear largely as objects of policy intervention rather than as sources of ecological knowledge or moral authority. Similarly, the statement emphasizes that “at the regional level, we are a party to ASEAN agreement on transboundary haze pollution⁵ which aims to mitigate land and forest fires through concerted national efforts and international cooperation”, further reinforcing the framing of climate action as a matter of institutional coordination and regulatory control, further consolidating a technocratic vision in which the future is rendered actionable through planning, expertise, and administrative competence.

A defining feature of Indonesia’s COP21 discourse is its emphasis on policy implementation and administrative capability. Climate change is situated within a future-oriented governance horizon structured around national programs, regulatory measures, and coordinated action across sectors such as land use, forestry, and infrastructure. This orientation is evident in statements such as: “Enhanced law enforcement, strengthened forest governance, and ecosystem restoration are some of the measures we have consistently taken at the national level”. This future orientation is linguistically realized through forward-looking constructions and planning-oriented expressions that frame climate action as something that can be organized and delivered over time. This orientation can be seen in expressions such as “We have done and will continue doing our best to develop constructive policy and cooperation with our partners to address the challenges” and “Indonesia stands ready to engage constructively with all parties for the conclusion of a successful Paris outcome.” These formulations project climate action into the future as an ongoing process of policy implementation, cooperation, and institutional commitment. The future is consistently represented as something that can be shaped through planning, control, and institutional intervention, rather than as an uncertain moral or ecological condition.

The discourse is reinforced through references to management, regulation, and control, which normalize the idea that climate change can be addressed through systematic intervention. Risk is framed not as an existential or ethical rupture, but as a challenge that can be mitigated through improved governance, enforcement mechanisms, and technological solutions. This framing is evident in statements such as “Enhanced law enforcement, strengthened forest governance, and ecosystem restoration are some of the measures we have consistently taken at the national level” and “Considering the enormity and complexity of the problem, we have done our parts on tackling the problem and preventing it to reoccur in the future.” These formulations position climate-related challenges as manageable through administrative intervention, regulatory action, and institutional capacity rather than as moral or existential crises. Linguistically, this is supported by the use of technical and bureaucratic vocabulary that situates climate change within domains of expertise and institutional management. Examples include expressions such as “enhanced law enforcement,” “strengthened forest governance,” “ecosystem restoration,” “climate finance,” and “means of implementation.” These terms frame climate action as a matter of administrative management, regulatory coordination, and institutional capacity rather than ethical obligation or ecological relationality.

Scientific expertise and technical solutions occupy a central position in Indonesia’s statement. Climate change is addressed through references to governance mechanisms,

⁵ The ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution (AATHP), signed in 2002, is a regional environmental treaty among ASEAN member states aimed at preventing, monitoring, and mitigating transboundary haze pollution, particularly that resulting from land and forest fires in Southeast Asia.

implementation frameworks, climate finance, and institutional coordination, emphasizing the role of state institutions in organizing and delivering climate action. This orientation is evident in references to mitigation, adaptation, means of implementation, climate finance, law enforcement, forest governance, and ecosystem restoration. Human agency is concentrated at the level of the state and its governing apparatus, while communities and ecosystems are primarily framed as objects of policy intervention and protection rather than as sources of ecological knowledge or relational responsibility. This orientation is evident in statements such as "Our government is committed to sustainable forest management" and "Enhanced law enforcement, strengthened forest governance, and ecosystem restoration are some of the measures we have consistently taken at the national level." In these formulations, the principal actors are governmental institutions and policy mechanisms, while forests and ecosystems appear primarily as entities to be managed, protected, and restored. Nature appears largely as a system to be managed and stabilized, rather than as a living relation embedded in cultural or moral worlds. This orientation is evident in references to forests as carbon sinks and environmental assets requiring governance intervention. For example, the speech states that "Indonesia's forest also serves as carbon sinks" and emphasizes "protection, conservation and sustainable management of forest" as national priorities. Similarly, references to "enhanced law enforcement," "strengthened forest governance," and "ecosystem restoration" frame ecological systems primarily as objects of management, regulation, and protection rather than as participants in moral or relational communities

Although SDG 13 had not yet been formally institutionalized at the time of COP21, Indonesia's discourse anticipates the technocratic logic later embedded in the goal. Through its emphasis on integration into national policy, administrative coordination, and measurable outcomes, the speech articulates climate futures that align closely with the governance rationalities codified in SDG 13. From this perspective, SDG 13 can be understood as an institutional crystallization of technocratic climate imaginaries already articulated at COP21. Indonesia's COP21 discourse thus exemplifies how technocratic climate language constructs climate change as a manageable governance problem and renders the future actionable through planning, expertise, and institutional control.

Ecuador: Relational Ecological Futures at COP21

In contrast to Indonesia's technocratically oriented discourse, Ecuador's national statement delivered at the Leaders' Event of COP21 articulates climate futures predominantly through relational ecological climate language. Speaking on behalf of the state, Rafael Correa frames climate change as a moral and civilizational condition that threatens the continuity of life systems, affecting ecosystems, social relations, cultural identities, and human coexistence with the natural world. Linguistically, this orientation is reflected in the use of evaluative and morally charged vocabulary that frames climate change in terms of responsibility, obligation, and collective consequence rather than technical management. Examples include expressions such as "unlimited economic growth is undesirable ... and above all, impossible," "the greatest challenge that humanity has ever faced," and "our responsibility before future generations." These evaluative formulations frame climate change as an ethical and civilizational concern, emphasizing moral responsibility and collective obligation rather than administrative management alone.

This relational ecological orientation is articulated most clearly through Ecuador's explicit ethical critique of dominant development paradigms. This evaluative construction

explicitly rejects growth-centered development logic and reframes climate change as a moral and civilizational issue rather than a technical challenge. In his COP21 statement, President Rafael Correa rejects the premise of unlimited economic expansion, asserting that “unlimited economic growth is undesirable... and above all, impossible.” (pp. 1-3) The use of evaluative predicates such as “undesirable” and “impossible” positions economic growth within a moral and existential register rather than a purely economic one. This formulation reframes climate change as a civilizational challenge that calls into question prevailing assumptions about progress, development, and human dominance over nature. By situating climate change within a broader ethical critique of growth-oriented governance, the discourse foregrounds moral responsibility as a central organizing principle of climate action. This critique resonates with Vandana Shiva’s⁶ environmental justice perspective, which links ecological degradation to extractivist development and epistemic marginalization.

This ethical repositioning is further reinforced through Ecuador’s explicit invocation of non-anthropocentric ecological principles. President Correa calls for the international community to “go even further and draft a Universal Declaration of the Rights of Nature,” The call to “draft a Universal Declaration of the Rights of Nature” discursively positions nature as a subject with intrinsic value, rather than an object of governance or resource management, thereby extending moral and legal recognition beyond human interests to encompass ecological systems themselves. The phrase “Rights of Nature” assigns juridical and moral agency to the non-human world, discursively positioning nature as a subject rather than an object of governance. Through this formulation, nature is constructed not as a resource to be managed or a system exposed to risk, but as a living entity entitled to protection and care. This orientation also resonates with the Andean concept of *Sumak Kawsay* (*Buen Vivir*), which emphasizes harmonious coexistence between human communities and the natural world rather than development based on extractive growth (Gudynas, 2011). Although the term is not explicitly invoked throughout the speech, its underlying relational logic is reflected in Ecuador’s advocacy of the Rights of Nature and its critique of conventional development paradigms. The articulation of such relational ecological knowledge within an international climate forum also illustrates the challenges of translating indigenous and locally grounded environmental epistemologies into globally legible policy discourse. Climate futures are thus imagined through relational accountability rather than administrative control, positioning ethical obligation and ecological stewardship—rather than technical expertise—as central sources of authority. This framing also establishes an intergenerational temporal orientation, in which climate action is understood as a responsibility toward the continuity of life rather than the delivery of policy targets.

A defining feature of Ecuador’s COP21 discourse is its emphasis on responsibility, care, and protection as foundational principles of climate action. The language consistently foregrounds collective obligation and ecological stewardship, framing climate change as a shared moral concern that demands respect for the intrinsic value of nature. This is linguistically realized through agentive and value-laden expressions that emphasize duty and care, rather than through abstract or procedural terminology. Examples include statements such as “our responsibility before future generations” and “we have the moral obligation to change our relationship with nature.” Similarly, Ecuador’s call to adopt a “Universal Declaration of the Rights of Nature” frames environmental protection not as a technical policy objective but as an ethical commitment grounded in respect for the intrinsic value of the non-human world. These expressions foreground duty, care, and stewardship through explicitly moral language. Rather

⁶ Indian scholar, environmental activist, and ecofeminist.

than representing the environment as an abstract system exposed to calculable risks, Ecuador's discourse presents nature as a living entity with which humans maintain reciprocal relationships.

References to indigenous peoples, ancestral territories, and local communities play a central discursive role in this construction of climate futures. These actors are not framed merely as stakeholders to be consulted or beneficiaries of climate policy, but as custodians of ecological knowledge and long-standing relational practices that sustain human–environment balance. Their knowledge is articulated as embedded in place, memory, and lived experience.

The temporal orientation of Ecuador's discourse further distinguishes its relational ecological framing. The statement frames time intergenerationally. This orientation is reflected in language that links present action to future inheritance, constructing the future as something to be sustained rather than delivered. This intergenerational framing is evident in references to "our responsibility before future generations" and in the warning that current patterns of development threaten the long-term continuity of life systems. Rather than emphasizing policy milestones or measurable targets, these formulations position climate action as an ethical obligation extending beyond the present generation and toward the preservation of ecological and social continuity.

Although SDG 13 had not yet been formally adopted at the time of COP21, Ecuador's discourse articulates climate futures that align with relational ecological principles that are only partially reflected within technocratically structured global frameworks. Read retrospectively through SDG 13 as an analytical lens, Ecuador's speech re-signifies climate action as an ethical commitment rather than a governance instrument. Climate responsibility is framed not in terms of compliance with indicators or reporting mechanisms, but as the protection of life systems and the maintenance of relationships between humans, nature, and future generations.

Ecuador's COP21 discourse thus constructs a vision of climate futures that is relational in orientation. By foregrounding ethics, interdependence, and intergenerational responsibility, the statement offers an alternative climate imaginary centered on care and sustainability. This relational ecological framing broadens the range of meanings through which climate action can be articulated and demonstrates how tropical states can construct climate futures grounded in moral and ecological continuity at moments of global political significance.

However, this relational ecological framing, while ethically expansive, also faces limitations within prevailing global governance structures. Because it does not easily translate into measurable targets or policy instruments, it risks being marginalized within institutional frameworks such as SDG 13, which prioritize quantification and administrative coordination. Nevertheless, some elements of relational ecological thinking have achieved institutional recognition, most notably through Ecuador's constitutional incorporation of the Rights of Nature and the growing international visibility of Indigenous and local knowledge systems within global environmental governance frameworks (Gudynas, 2011; United Nations, 2022).

Comparative Synthesis

The comparative analysis of Indonesia's and Ecuador's COP21 head-of-state national statements reveals two distinct discursive regimes through which climate futures were articulated at a formative moment in global climate governance. Although both countries participated in the same landmark summit organized under the auspices of the United Nations, their climate discourses diverge markedly in terms of dominant language, temporal orientation, sources of authority, and the meanings attributed to nature and responsibility. Table 3

summarizes the key discursive contrasts between Indonesia and Ecuador, highlighting how differing linguistic regimes articulated divergent climate imaginaries that would later be differentially institutionalized in global frameworks such as SDG 13.

Table 3. Discursive Constructions of Climate Futures at COP21 (Read through SDG 13)

Dimension	Indonesia	Ecuador
Dominant language	Technocratic	Relational ecological
SDG 13 orientation	Anticipatory governance logic	Ethical–relational logic
Nature	System / resource at risk	Living relation
Future	Governable trajectory	Intergenerational continuity
Authority	State expertise and planning	Moral responsibility and care

Source: Own elaboration.

In Indonesia’s case, technocratic climate language structures the articulation of climate futures. Climate change is framed primarily as a governance and development challenge to be addressed through policy coordination, administrative capacity, and state-led implementation. Read retrospectively through SDG 13, Indonesia’s COP21 discourse anticipates a governance-oriented logic in which climate responsibility is organized around policy integration, institutional performance, and measurable outcomes. The future is imagined as a governable trajectory—one that can be shaped through planning, regulation, and technical intervention. Authority is concentrated in the state and its governing apparatus, with legitimacy derived from expertise, evidence-based decision-making, and long-term strategic planning. Nature appears largely as a system or resource exposed to risks—such as deforestation, land degradation, or climate impacts—that must be managed, stabilized, or controlled through governance mechanisms.

Ecuador’s COP21 discourse is anchored in relational ecological climate language, producing a fundamentally different construction of climate futures. Rather than organizing climate action around governance mechanisms or implementation capacity, Ecuador’s statement articulates climate change as a moral and civilizational crisis that disrupts relationships sustaining life systems, cultural continuity, and intergenerational well-being. When read through SDG 13 as an analytical lens, Ecuador’s discourse aligns less with the goal’s technocratic architecture than with ethical commitments that the goal only partially accommodates. The future is not conceived as a set of targets to be achieved, but as an inheritance shaped by present moral choices. Authority is grounded in ethical obligation, collective responsibility, and ecological custodianship rather than in technical expertise alone. Nature is framed as a living relation rather than a passive system, reinforcing a worldview in which humans are embedded within ecological systems rather than positioned above them as managers.

The contrast between these two discursive regimes highlights how SDG 13 operates not simply as a policy instrument, but as a discursive site whose meanings are shaped by earlier articulations of climate futures. Structurally, SDG 13 is organized around technocratic principles such as integration, capacity-building, and monitoring, particularly through Target 13.2 (integration of climate change measures into national policies and planning) and Target 13.3 (capacity-building, education, and institutional strengthening). However, as this comparative analysis demonstrates, the discursive foundations of these principles were neither

uniform nor inevitable. Indonesia's COP21 discourse aligns closely with the technocratic rationalities later formalized in SDG 13, while Ecuador's discourse articulates relational ecological commitments that remain only partially legible within the goal's institutional design.

This comparative synthesis underscores the importance of examining climate governance not only in terms of policy alignment or institutional performance, but also in terms of discursive construction. The differences observed between Indonesia and Ecuador cannot be reduced to differences in development level, capacity, or vulnerability alone. Rather, they reflect contrasting ways of imagining the relationship between humans, nature, and the future at a critical moment in global climate governance. By foregrounding these differences, the analysis demonstrates that climate futures in tropical contexts are not uniformly technocratic nor inherently relational, but are actively produced through language. In this sense, SDG 13 can be understood as a discursive battleground whose institutional form carries forward, and constrains, competing visions of climate action and futurity articulated at the Paris climate summit.

Importantly, this contrast is not neutral. The closer alignment of Indonesia's discourse with technocratic governance logics positions it as more readily compatible with institutional frameworks such as SDG 13, while Ecuador's relational ecological framing remains only partially legible within these structures. This asymmetry suggests that global climate governance may systematically privilege certain discursive forms while constraining others.

Discussion

SDG 13 as a Discursive Battleground

The findings indicate that SDG 13 does not determine how climate futures are imagined or articulated. Although structurally technocratic in its emphasis on targets, indicators, and institutional integration, SDG 13 does not impose a singular narrative of climate action. Rather, it can be understood as an institutional crystallization of climate imaginaries articulated at pivotal moments in global climate governance, most notably COP21. Viewed through this discursive lineage, SDG 13 emerges as a site of contestation in which competing climate futures become visible. Climate governance therefore cannot be evaluated solely in terms of implementation or effectiveness, but must also attend to the linguistic and symbolic processes through which particular forms of knowledge, values, and futures are rendered legitimate. In this sense, discourse shapes not only climate policy, but also the ethical and political horizons of climate action.

Although this analysis focuses on COP21 as a formative discursive moment, subsequent developments in global climate governance, particularly the operationalization of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), the Global Stocktake process, and increasing reliance on climate metrics and reporting systems, indicate that technocratic framings continue to dominate institutional practice. Contemporary climate governance remains strongly oriented toward quantification, monitoring, and performance evaluation, reinforcing the centrality of administrative rationality in shaping climate action. At the same time, relational ecological perspectives, such as rights of nature, indigenous climate knowledge, and alternative development paradigms, have gained visibility in international discourse but remain only partially integrated into formal governance mechanisms (Dryzek, 1995). This suggests that the discursive asymmetry identified at COP21 persists in current climate policy architectures.

From a critical perspective, the technocratic institutionalization of climate governance, exemplified by SDG 13, does not merely organize action but also narrows the range of legitimate climate imaginaries. By privileging measurable targets, administrative coordination, and policy integration, SDG 13 systematically foregrounds forms of knowledge aligned with state expertise while rendering relational, ethical, and place-based ecological understandings less visible within formal governance structures. This asymmetry is not neutral: it reflects broader power dynamics in global climate governance, where certain ways of knowing and articulating the future are institutionalized, while others remain discursively marginalized. Similar tensions have been identified in scholarship on Rights of Nature, *Buen Vivir*, and Indigenous environmental governance, where relational ecological understandings of human–environment relations often coexist uneasily with governance frameworks that prioritize measurable targets, policy integration, and administrative coordination (Escobar, 2022). The Ecuadorian case should therefore be understood not as an isolated exception but as one manifestation of broader alternative climate imaginaries that remain only partially accommodated within dominant climate governance institutions. In this sense, SDG 13 operates not only as a governance framework but also as a selective filter that stabilizes technocratic futures while constraining alternative ecological imaginaries.

Implications for Tropical Climate Governance

The contrasting articulations observed in Indonesia’s and Ecuador’s COP21 head-of-state climate discourse suggest that tropical climate governance is neither uniform nor predetermined by geography, vulnerability, or participation in global frameworks such as the Paris Agreement and, later, SDG 13. Rather than constituting a coherent or homogeneous category, tropical climate governance can be understood as a discursively differentiated field in which distinct epistemic, moral, and political orientations shape how climate action is understood, justified, and legitimized. These differences call into question generalized assumptions about “the tropics” as a singular site of climate vulnerability or policy deficit and underscore the importance of attending to the specific linguistic regimes through which climate governance is articulated.

The predominance of technocratic climate language in Indonesia’s COP21 discourse has important implications for how climate action is imagined and operationalized in tropical contexts. By emphasizing managerial rationalities, policy instruments, and state-centered expertise, technocratic discourse tends to orient climate action toward what can be planned, regulated, and administratively delivered. This orientation facilitates coordination and aligns closely with governance logics later formalized in SDG 13, particularly its emphasis on integration, capacity-building, and measurable outcomes. At the same time, technocratic framing may place less emphasis on ethical, cultural, and relational dimensions of climate change that do not readily translate into indicators or targets. As a result, climate governance can be framed primarily as a matter of optimization and control, rather than as a condition that reshapes relationships between humans, environments, and future generations.

The prominence of relational ecological climate language in Ecuador’s COP21 discourse highlights an alternative way of articulating climate governance beyond technical management and administrative delivery. By foregrounding care, stewardship, and intergenerational responsibility, relational discourse positions climate action as an ethical practice embedded in social, cultural, and ecological relationships. This orientation broadens the range of actors, values, and forms of knowledge considered relevant to climate governance,

including indigenous epistemologies and community-based understandings of human–environment relations. In doing so, it brings into focus assumptions, often implicit in global climate frameworks, about the role of technical expertise and institutional control in defining effective governance (Dryzek, 1995).

The same global framework, later institutionalized in SDG 13, can therefore, be interpreted and mobilized in different ways depending on how climate futures are articulated within national contexts. These findings suggest that strengthening climate action in tropical regions requires attention not only to institutional capacity and policy alignment but also to the discursive conditions through which climate futures are imagined and legitimized. Recognizing discourse as a constitutive element of climate governance creates space for more plural and context-sensitive approaches to climate action.

Contribution to Tropical Studies and Linguistics

This study contributes to both tropical studies and linguistics by challenging the tendency to treat the tropics as a homogeneous analytical category while demonstrating how language participates in the construction of climate futures rather than merely reflecting policy intent or institutional priorities (Haugen, 1972; Penz & Fill, 2022). By approaching SDG 13 as a discursive site whose meanings can be traced to earlier climate discourse, the article bridges tropical studies and linguistic analysis. Much of the literature on the SDGs focuses on implementation, monitoring, and effectiveness, often treating goals such as SDG 13 as stable frameworks with self-evident meanings. This study instead shows how the technocratic architecture of SDG 13 can be interpreted as reflecting the partial institutionalization of specific climate imaginaries articulated at COP21, while alternative relational ecological orientations are only partially reflected within its structure. In doing so, the analysis highlights language as a key dimension of power in global climate governance, where different visions of climate futures are articulated, stabilized, or constrained.

Nevertheless, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study focuses on only two tropical states and therefore does not claim to represent the full diversity of climate discourse across tropical regions. Second, the analysis is based on head-of-state statements delivered at a single climate summit (COP21), which capture a specific discursive moment rather than longer-term developments in national climate communication. Third, the findings are interpretive rather than causal; the study does not argue that the discourses examined directly shaped the institutional design of SDG 13. Instead, SDG 13 is used as an analytical lens through which earlier articulations of climate futures can be examined retrospectively. Future research could extend the analysis to additional countries, climate summits, and policy documents to assess the broader applicability of the analytical framework developed here. The distinction between technocratic and relational ecological climate language offers a transferable analytical framework for examining how climate futures are discursively constructed across different governance contexts.

Conclusion

This study suggests that climate futures associated with SDG 13 are not prescribed by global policy frameworks but are actively produced through discourse. By comparing two head-of-state statements delivered at COP21 by Indonesia and Ecuador, the analysis illustrates how technocratic climate language and relational ecological climate language can be associated with

divergent climate imaginaries within the same historical and institutional setting. These imaginaries shape how climate action is understood globally. The findings further suggest that, although SDG 13 is structurally technocratic in design, it does not fully fix the meaning of climate action. Rather, it can be understood as a discursive container whose contours may be traced to earlier articulations of climate futures at COP21. Within the cases examined, the contrast between Indonesia's technocratic framing and Ecuador's relational ecological framing indicates that climate futures are discursively contingent rather than wholly predetermined by institutional structures, and that climate governance involves not only policy implementation but also the linguistic construction and legitimation of possible futures.

By foregrounding intra-tropical variation, this study challenges homogenizing representations of the tropics in climate scholarship and suggests that tropical climate governance is shaped not only by shared vulnerabilities or institutional capacities, but also by diverse epistemic traditions, cultural orientations, and linguistic practices. Technocratic and relational ecological climate language foreground different dimensions of climate governance. By examining the discursive construction of climate futures that preceded and informed the institutionalization of SDG 13, this research contributes to broader efforts to rethink climate governance in the tropics and beyond.

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The author(s) declare that no AI-assisted technologies (such as large language models, chatbots, or AI writing tools) were used in the writing or preparation of this manuscript. All content was written solely by the author(s), who take full responsibility for the integrity and originality of the work.

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