



Photo: Earth System Governance Conference 2026

2026 Earth System Governance Conference, September 7-11, Bath, UK

The ACHIEVE project participated at the 2026 Earth System Governance conference in Bath, UK, one of the largest conferences of social scientists working on questions related to environmental change. ACHIEVE researchers contributed to conversations about integrity of voluntary climate action in theory and practice. During the conference, ACHIEVE organized two panels and one innovative session:

- **Panel 1:** Integrity Beyond Compliance: Justice, Equity, and Place-Based Practice in Voluntary Climate Action
- **Panel 2:** Integrity Under Pressure: Governing Voluntary Climate Action in Turbulent Times
- Innovative session on Co-creating a Roadmap for Accelerating High-Integrity Voluntary Climate Action

Across these and other sessions, several ACHIEVE members participated as chairs, discussants, and paper presenters, bringing different perspectives on cooperative climate initiatives, corporate target setting, climate finance, integrated nature-climate action, synergies and trade-offs of voluntary climate action, and changing political contexts.

In the first panel, a key message was that integrity cannot be reduced to compliance with standards, disclosure requirements, and accountability processes. These remain essential, but high-integrity action needs to respond to questions of justice and equity, e.g. who participates in initiatives, whose priorities and knowledge count, and how benefits and burdens are distributed. ACHIEVE contributions explored these issues from several directions. Alexander Nordt’s work examined synergies and trade-offs between accountability, transparency, democratic decision-making and participation within cooperative climate initiatives, while Kiri van den Wall Bake and Birka Wicke’s contribution addressed the challenge of making indicators of corporate climate ambition meaningful and comparable. Sander Chan and Paul Hagenström's work on integrated nature-climate initiatives further highlighted the importance of examining where action takes place, whose priorities it reflects, and whether climate interventions generate equitable and context-sensitive, and positive environmental outcomes.

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The second panel added another dimension: what happens to integrity when voluntary climate action comes under pressure? Political contestation, changing regulatory environments and economic uncertainty can affect not only whether actors make ambitious commitments, but whether those commitments endure and translate into implementation. Lauri Peterson and Sander Chan examined how cooperative climate initiatives respond to national climate-policy contexts, considering whether climate policy reversals might suppress voluntary action or trigger counter-mobilization. Sebastian Reyes de la Lanza and Sander Chan approached integrity from the perspective of climate finance, investigating how participation in cooperative initiatives, shared standards and network structures may influence the climate performance of financial institutions. Cornelia Fast and Lisa-Maria Glass both explored how cooperative climate initiatives address synergies and trade-offs in the agrifood and built-environment sectors, respectively. These contributions stress questions on the durability, implementation, and institutional conditions that allow voluntary commitments to produce meaningful outcomes over time.



ACHIEVE’s insights resonated far beyond our sessions. Across the conference, questions of justice, equity, accountability, democratic legitimacy, and power repeatedly surfaced in relation to debates on how voluntary climate efforts by non-state and subnational actors can help close the gaps between global commitments and national implementation, as well as the use of indicators to measure and disclose progress of said voluntary climate efforts. For ACHIEVE, these discussions reinforce the importance of understanding integrity as multidimensional and context dependent. This closely reflects our ambition to develop principles, criteria and indicators for high-integrity voluntary climate action.