

Connected Futures: Equity, Climate, and Health – How to navigate and use diplomacy in a complex political reality

PMAC 2026 Side Meeting, Bangkok – Monday, January 26, 2026



This PMAC 2026 side meeting examined how diplomacy and governance can be used for addressing climate change, health, equity, and innovation in an increasingly fragmented geopolitical landscape. Against the backdrop of political instability, demographic shifts, technological disruption, and climate-related shocks, speakers emphasized that today’s interconnected crises cannot be addressed through siloed approaches. Instead, sustained cross-sectoral coordination and strategic diplomatic engagement are required at community, national, regional, and multilateral levels. Diplomacy is a practical craft, rooted in understanding power dynamics, negotiation processes, domestic political economy, and the informal relationships that shape decision-making.



Fragmentation Across Governance Systems at Various Levels

A central concern throughout the discussion was the fragmentation across governance frameworks. Climate COP negotiations, the World Health Assembly, trade and economic platforms, and regional mechanisms such as ASEAN and APEC often operate in parallel rather than in coordination. Policy commitments made in one forum may contradict or dilute positions taken in another. Effective alignment and coordination require informal processes, sustained engagement across sectors, and coalition-building before formal negotiations begin.

Health and climate in economic and trade negotiations remain particularly challenging. Limited technical literacy among negotiators, industry pressures, and domestic political constraints shape negotiation outcomes. As one speaker emphasized, “Health is not a health ministry issue, it is everyone’s issue”. Without whole-of-government coordination, diplomatic efforts risk being undermined by competing mandates.



Equity at the Centre of Climate and Health Governance

Speakers warned against the politicisation of equity, emphasising that inequities are measurable realities with direct consequences for economic productivity, social cohesion, and security. Climate change and emerging technologies, particularly artificial intelligence, were described as risk multipliers that could deepen disparities if governance frameworks fail to prioritise inclusion and access.

Vulnerable populations including indigenous communities, migrants, displaced people, and those in protracted crises are disproportionately affected by climate shocks and health emergencies. Panellists stressed that equity must be embedded from the outset of policy design rather than treated as an afterthought.

Community engagement was highlighted as fundamental to legitimate and effective governance. Meaningful engagement requires listening before acting, sustained

participation beyond high-level events, and recognition of indigenous and local knowledge in policy design and implementation.

Innovation, AI, and the Role of the Private Sector

Innovation featured prominently as both an opportunity and a challenge. AI-enabled tools for disease surveillance, early warning systems for climate-related health risks, and digital health platforms offer significant potential to strengthen health systems and improve responsiveness. However, without safeguards, digital divides will reinforce existing inequities.



The session underscored the complementary roles of public governance, diplomacy and private sector innovation. Governments must provide clear regulatory frameworks, policy coherence, and predictable conditions for investment. At the same time, private sector operational capacity and technological development are essential for scaling solutions. Philanthropic and concessional financing were described as catalytic instruments, capable of de-risking investments in frontier technologies and areas where market incentives alone are insufficient.

Leadership, Gender, and the Path Forward

Leadership is a prerequisite and cross-cutting enabler of effective diplomacy. Strong leadership is required to coordinate across sectors, align domestic and international agendas, and translate commitments into implementation. The growing politicisation of science and health highlights the need for leaders who can navigate complex political landscapes while maintaining evidence-based decision-making.

Additionally, a strong regional lens emerged, with Asia-Pacific described as both highly vulnerable to climate impacts and uniquely positioned to lead. The region’s continued commitment to multilateral engagement, solidarity, and pragmatic cooperation was seen as an important counterbalance to global fragmentation.

Gender representation in climate and health governance remains uneven. Participants emphasised that advancing gender equality requires equal participation in addressing structural barriers through education, mentorship, institutional reform, and sustained investment rather than relying solely on numerical targets.

“You cannot negotiate the future without the future in the room”, one speaker noted, underscoring the importance of youth inclusion and intergenerational dialogue in shaping forward-looking governance frameworks.

The session concluded with a recognition that governance in a fragmented world demands patience, persistence, and strategic coalition-building. Diplomacy is not the outcome of a single negotiation, but a means and an ongoing process of aligning interests, building trust, and creating enabling conditions for action. By embedding equity at the centre, strengthening regional cooperation, responsibly leveraging innovation, and investing in diplomatic capacity, climate and health governance can evolve to meet the demands of an increasingly interconnected future.



The session was moderated by Dr. Garry Aslanyan, Manager of Partnerships and Global Engagement at TDR/WHO. Opening remarks were delivered by Dr. Sanjay Pattanshetty, Professor and Director of NIMS Institute of Public Health and Governance, NIMS University Jaipur. Framing remarks were provided by Dr. Anders Nordström, Advisor at Karolinska Institutet and former Ambassador for Global Health of Sweden.

The panel brought together diverse regional and sectoral perspectives. Panellists included Dr. Jemilah Mahmood, Executive Director of the Sunway Centre for Planetary Health; Dr. Prangtip Chansomskak, Deputy Director-General of the Department of International Economic Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand; Dr. Sandro Demaio, Director and Head of the WHO Asia-Pacific Centre for Environment; and Mr. Madhav Joshi, CEO of the India Health Fund.

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