



Essential background for Local and Regional Leaders on UNFCCC Advocacy

Prepared by ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability, in its capacity as the Focal Point of Local Governments and Municipal Authorities Constituency

Part I. Decision making process at the UNFCCC

1. What is the UNFCCC?

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was adopted at the Earth Summit held in Rio in 1992, and entered into force in 1994. National governments become Party to the UNFCCC or its supplementary agreements by ratifying these through their domestic legislative channels. Parties, primarily through ministries of environment or climate change, are responsible for its implementation. Because many of the provisions of the UNFCCC are inspirational, two supplementary documents provide further guidance. The Kyoto Protocol, adopted in 1997 and entered into force in 2005, primarily focuses on mitigation of greenhouse gases by developed countries. The Paris Agreement, adopted in 2015 and entered into force in 2016, defines roles for all countries and stakeholders and encompasses all elements of climate action. Because of this universal scope, it has become an integral element of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted in 2015.

2. What is the COP?

The Conference of Parties (COP), held for two weeks, is the annual meeting of the national governments as the highest level decision making body by Ministers to monitor and enhance progress on the implementation of the UNFCCC. The UNFCCC Secretariat, seated in Bonn, Germany, provides technical support to Parties on implementation. Each year, one national government is elected by Parties as the President of the COP to provide political guidance in the work of the Secretariat and Parties. The six regional groups under the United Nations rotate in proposing the COP Presidency and the COP usually takes place at the country of the COP Presidency. A COP President conducts informal consultations and meetings of heads of delegations all-year round, focusing on key negotiation issues. To ensure continuity, COP presidencies of two consecutive years work hand-in-hand. The role of COP President usually is assumed by either the Minister of Environment or Foreign Affairs, depending on the decision of the hosting Party, and it sometimes can be at the level of Heads of State/ Government. As of 2015, the COP President also appoints high level climate champions to bridge the negotiations process and the climate action by all stakeholders.

3. Year-round process for intergovernmental negotiations

The topics to be discussed and draft decisions to be adopted at COP meetings are prepared and guided by two subsidiary bodies focusing on implementation (SBI) and scientific and technical guidance (SBSTA). These bodies meet for two weeks twice a year. In addition, a number of technical groups, focusing on various technical details such as finance, adaptation and capacity building, which meet throughout the year, subject to availability of resources and work load of their agenda items.



Part II. Engagement of local and regional governments at the UNFCCC

1. Local Governments and Municipal Authorities (LGMA) Constituency

The Agenda 21 adopted at the Earth Summit in Rio in 1992 introduced an innovative concept by defining nine Major Groups of society as essential partners of the implementation of global agreements. Local authorities are recognized as one of these nine groups and in the UNFCCC context, they are gathered under Local Governments and Municipal Authorities (LGMA) Constituency. The LGMA Constituency is one of the three groups that have been engaging in the UNFCCC process since COP1 in 1995. As of 2017, more than 20 organizations are involved in the LGMA Constituency and ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability has acted as the LGMA focal point since its inception.

Through the LGMA Constituency, local and regional governments contribute in the UNFCCC negotiations by sharing their views on various negotiation topics. They provide written or oral interventions, nominate representatives to technical workshops, participate at the UNFCCC negotiation meetings as observers, engage in the consultations of the Presidencies and convene specific events at the official meetings. This work of the LGMA Constituency played an instrumental role in the adoption of specific COP decisions related to local and regional governments in 2010 and 2013, followed by historic recognition of the importance of engagement of all levels of governments enshrined in the Paris Agreement and recognition of cities and other subnational governments as a dedicated group within Non-Party Stakeholders of the UNFCCC process.

2. Marrakech Partnership for Global Climate Action

At COP17 in Durban in 2011, Parties recognized the inadequacy of the action and commitments of national governments in meeting the goals of the UNFCCC and started to explore ways to engage stakeholders. The 2014 UN Climate Summit held by the UN Secretary General introduced major progress in relationship between the United Nations with various stakeholders, including appointment of Michael Bloomberg, former mayor of New York City as the UN Special Envoy for Cities and Climate Change. In the same year, the UNFCCC Secretariat launched the Non-State Actor Zone for Climate Action (NAZCA), an online platform to demonstrate actions by stakeholders, followed by creation of LimaParis Action Agenda. In 2015, all these efforts were embedded in the COP21 Decision for the implementation of the Paris Agreement and COP Presidencies are assigned to designate High Level Climate Champions to guide these efforts. In 2016, Marrakech Partnership was launched as a more systematic approach to engage global climate action in the work of the UNFCCC, through year-round engagement in thematic content groups, release of a Yearbook, supported by a Leadership Network. In 2017, Edmund J. Brown, Governor of California, was appointed as the COP23 Special Advisor for States and Regions, which provided additional support to this engagement. The Climate Chance Conference, held annually since 2015, provides an additional contribution by mobilizing bottom-up initiatives among Major Groups.

3. Friends of Cities Group at the UNFCCC

While the work of LGMA Constituency and engagement in the action agenda present a unique added value, the decision-making process under the UNFCCC is still, and will continue to be, under the authority of national governments. In 2013, the LGMA Constituency invited like-minded national governments to gather under the Friends of Cities Group at the UNFCCC to create an informal mechanism to exchange information and provide more substantial inputs into the negotiations. The Friends of Cities Group will be instrumental in securing a prominent role for local and regional governments in the full implementation of the Paris Agreement.