

# SET-UP FOR SUCCESS: USING NON-NEGOTIATION SPACES TO INCREASE CLIMATE AMBITION

The 2019 UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) negotiations highlighted the struggle of moving beyond national interests towards effectively implementing the Paris Agreement and increasing national climate ambitions. This raises questions about the future of UNFCCC negotiations and whether their national government-driven process remains fit for purpose at this stage of Paris Agreement implementation. Non-negotiation spaces have emerged at the 'side' of the UNFCCC negotiations since 2011. They allow parties to explore common ground, scope predetermined negotiation positions and to engage in mutual learning from, and with, nonnational actors such as representatives from cities, businesses, NGOs and academi

This policy brief examines the role of non-negotiation settings, for example, the Action for Climate Empowerment (ACE) dialogues, stock-taking exercises and 'side events' (usually panel discussions/presentations co-hosted by non-national actors and party representatives.) These non-negotiation settings allow countries to share experiences on domestic climate legislation and best practices in implementing zero-carbon development plans with the goal of ultimately learning from each other and building parties' capacities.

## THE GROWTH OF NON-NEGOTIATION SETTINGS

COP22 in Marrakesh and COP23 in Bonn saw an increased inclusion of non-national actors and a shift from a single focus on the formal negotiations towards nonnegotiation settings. These conference spaces, in the 'Green' or 'Bonn' Zone, hosted presentations, panel discussions and roundtables led by or with the participation of non-national actors. The stronger involvement of non-national actors is an important formal recognition that these actors are crucial for implementing the Paris Agreement due to their capacity including technical capabilities, financial resources (especially the private sector) and low carbon policies by cities and other sub-national governments. However, these actors have no formal role in the UNFCCC negotiations as the negotiations remain a party-driven process. The inclusion of non-national actors is considered to be particularly important as it builds resilient global climate action even in the face of temporary adverse national government policies. Especially transnational networks of cities, other sub-national governments, companies and civil society such as 'America's Pledge – we are still in' (the Paris Agreement), have taken centre stage in the civil society spaces such as during COP23.

1. This policy brief highlights findings from Rietig 2014, Rietig & Peringer 2020, Rietig 2021.

## BRINGING TOGETHER PARTIES AND NON-NATIONAL ACTORS

The UNFCCC is increasingly called upon to strengthen the role and influence of nonnational actors as crucial partners for the implementation of the Paris Agreement. Nonnational actors operating within countries and in the transnational/international setting of the UNFCCC meetings will inevitably contribute a large share to greenhouse gas emission reductions. These actors include sub-national governments, including, cities (accounting for 50% of the global population and 65% of global energy demand), businesses and industry with transnational value chains as well as civil society organizations that advocate and implement behavioral changes.

The UNFCCC Global Climate Action (NAZCA) Portal offers an overview of the number and breath of the ambitions and actions of these non-national actors with over 27,000 actions by over 18,000 actors (UNFCCC, 2021). The 'Fridays for Future' youth movement succeeded in raising the climate crisis back to the forefront of many national political agendas and creating a higher sense of urgency among the public. Other key initiatives of non-national climate action include regional emission trading schemes such as the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative of the New England and Mid-Atlantic States of the US (Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, 2021) and the 'We Are Still In' (the Paris Agreement) coalition representing over 150 million Americans totaling over 9 trillion USD (We Are Still In, 2021), the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy with more than 10,000 cities and local governments from over 135 countries and the 'We Mean Business' coalition with over 1,300 companies who made over 1,900 commitments towards net-zero emissions representing over 24 trillion USD (We Mean Business Coalition, 2021).

These contributions of non-national actors will be crucial to further increase the national ambition expressed in Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and to make up for the gaps where national governments are lacking ambition. They send crucial signals to investors, including large institutional investment funds, that the demand for fossil fuels is decreasing and divestment will be crucial in the emerging low-to-zero carbon economies of the 21st century.

Countries increasingly recognize the important role non-national actors play in achieving and strengthening NDCs but there remains large scope to further include nonnational actors into NDCs and national climate policies (Hsu et al. 2020) as well as to improve the collaboration between national and non-national actors to more effectively implement climate action.

It is also important to evaluate the effectiveness of these and other non-national actors both in terms of reducing emissions and influencing political decision-making in countries and within the UNFCCC negotiations. This is particularly important as there is a tendency to applaud non-national actors as the solution for addressing sustainability deficits without critically evaluating the extent to which they are actually capable and willing to take on implementation responsibilities beyond public relations campaigns, green/climate-washing, voluntary commitments or lip-service.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Critically evaluate the effectiveness of non-national actors in reducing GHG emissions beyond public relations campaigns, green/climate-washing, lip-service and voluntary commitments;**
- **Encourage the meaningful inclusion and participation of non-national actors in UNFCCC meetings to facilitate mutual learning and capacity building.**

## LEARNING AND CAPACITY BUILDING THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS

UNFCCC meetings offer the opportunity to link formal and informal networks and partnerships involving governments and non-national actors into the UNFCCC process. These networks and partnerships will be crucial for the implementation of NDCs, but they need to be supported to evolve into inclusive learning and capacity building partnerships.

Effective learning and capacity building partnerships involve meaningful conversations, reflections about lessons learned, the exchange of knowledge and experiences regarding what works in which contexts, the transfer of policies and the celebration of achievements while continually striving for further improvements. This kind of learning requires resources in the form of staff time and the ability to make long-term commitments.

Beyond such mutual learning activities around climate action and policies, partnerships need to also allow for capacity building in the form of resources such as access to finance and investment at competitive rates, leapfrogging to install low/zero carbon technologies and infrastructures as well as specific support for education and a socially inclusive transition. For such partnerships to be successful, it is crucial that actors who are learning and receiving capacity building have a high sense of ownership and understand themselves as a full partner.

The most meaningful partnerships are about mutual learning that go beyond existing development assistance from the Global North to the Global South; also, they should focus on two-way exchanges from the Global South to the Global North, as well as South-South capacity building. In addition, partnerships need to bring together different actors from across government, civil society organizations, cities, the private sector and international organizations.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR THE ACE DIALOGUES

The Doha Climate Change Conference (COP18) in 2012 created an annual forum which came to be titled the Action on Climate Empowerment (ACE) Dialogues. They provide a regular event for parties and other stakeholders to share their experiences, exchange ideas, good practices and lessons learned related to education, training, public awareness, public participation, public access to information and international cooperation related to implementing the Convention.

These dialogues are an important step forward. At the same time, they could use more refinement to better fulfill their potential. The process used should be adopted to better fit the goal of the meeting. For example, at the June 2019 ACE Dialogues there seemed to be some focus on recording the ideas of the over 100 participants but there was no final report, resulting in questions about the purpose of recording the ideas. At those ACE dialogues, the vast majority of the participants tended to be from civil society. The few parties who participated sent the most junior members of their national delegation. This limits party to non-party learning opportunities. In preparation for the next set of dialogues, we recommend more engagement with parties as to what the ACE dialogues would need to provide to encourage more robust party representation.

The process design can then flow directly from the statement of goals and the participant analysis. For example, if the goal is to maximize dialogue, most of the time should be dedicated to talking opportunities among the session participants. This was not the case at the ACE Dialogue in Bonn in 2019 which started with a 15-member panel, reducing the time for participants to exchange and discuss ideas. If the goal is to develop and share

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Define what the UNFCCC wants to achieve with the ACE Dialogues – both the immediate output and the desired impact;
- Conduct a participant stakeholder analysis to identify what type of participants the ACE Dialogues need to succeed, how to attract these participants and what they need to meaningfully contribute;
- Design the Dialogues tailored to the session goal and the desired participants.

## CONCLUSION

COP26 and subsequent UNFCCC meetings offer the opportunity to link formal and informal networks and partnerships involving governments and non-national actors into the UNFCCC process. These networks and partnerships are crucial for the implementation of Nationally Determined Contributions. They require support to evolve into inclusive learning and capacity building partnerships that go beyond casual exchanges, virtual presence in databases and public relations announcements (Long, Clough and Rietig 2019). There is a danger that the large number of loose networks results in the illusion of strong bottom-up action while the actual carbon emission reductions remain incremental and temporary.

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