

Non-governmental organization constituencies

What are constituencies?

During the intergovernmental climate change process under the auspices of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, non-governmental organizations admitted as observers at sessions of the Convention bodies have formed themselves into loose groups with diverse but broadly clustered interests or perspectives. In the early days of the climate change convention process the business and industry organizations and the environmental groups were particularly active and initiated systematic channels of communications with the secretariat and the Parties. This resulted in the acknowledgment of “constituencies”, with their own focal points. A flexible and manageable system evolved which enhanced the participation of large numbers of observer organizations. There are currently more than 1,200 admitted observer organizations. Without the cooperation of ‘constituency’ focal points, it would not be possible for the secretariat to maintain effective interaction with interested stakeholders.

Initially there were two constituencies, the business and industry non-governmental organizations (BINGO) and the environmental non-governmental organizations (ENGO). Other constituencies have been formed and recognized since. Firstly, the local government and municipal authorities (LGMA) at COP 1, then the indigenous peoples organizations (IPO) at COP 7, the research and independent non-governmental organizations (RINGO) at COP 9, the trade union non-governmental organizations (TUNGO) at COP 14. Three more groups have requested constituency status and are currently under review until COP 17: farmers and agricultural non-governmental organizations (Farmers), women and gender non-governmental organizations (Women and Gender) and youth non-governmental organizations (YOUNGO). The nine constituency focal points facilitate the exchange of information between the secretariat and the admitted observer organizations.

Together the nine constituencies embrace large numbers of admitted kindred organizations, but some organizations such as faith groups and national parliamentarians, remain outside these broad groupings.

Participation in a particular constituency is the choice of an individual or individual organization, and is neither official nor binding. It does not preclude direct communication with the secretariat by any observer organization, nor does it imply any ‘sovereignty’ over the constituency on the part of the focal point organization. However, there are potential benefits in belonging to one of the constituencies - access to the Plenary floor in the form of an intervention, allocation of secondary badges when a site access limit is planned by the secretariat, receipt of informal advance information from the secretariat, timely information through constituency daily meetings, occasional and very limited invitation to Ministerial reception by host Governments, access to bilateral meetings with officials, invitation by the secretariat to limited-access workshops between sessional periods, etc.

How do the constituencies interact with the secretariat?

The interaction between the secretariat and the constituencies is through the focal points who:

- provide a conduit for the exchange of official information between their constituents and the secretariat;
- assist the secretariat in ensuring an effective participation appropriate to an intergovernmental meeting;
- coordinate observer interaction at sessions including convening constituency meetings, organizing meetings with officials, providing names for the speakers list and representation at official functions;
- provide logistical support to their constituents during sessions;
- assist the secretariat in realizing representative observer participation at workshops and other limited-access meetings.
