



United Nations

FCCC/SBI/2016/INF.13



Framework Convention on
Climate Change

Distr.: General
21 October 2016

English only

Subsidiary Body for Implementation

Forty-fifth session

Marrakech, 7–14 November 2016

Item 17(c) of the provisional agenda

Administrative, financial and institutional matters

Other financial matters

Evolving functions and operations of the secretariat in the light of decision 1/CP.21

Note by the Executive Secretary

Summary

This note examines the evolving functions and operations of the secretariat in the light of decision 1/CP.21. It discusses foreseeable functions and operations, taking into account new mandates and the experience in implementing existing related mandates. The Executive Secretary would like to use this note to share with Parties her vision of the evolving role of the secretariat over the coming years.

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I. Introduction

A. Mandate and scope of the note

1. At the forty-fourth session of the Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI), the Chair of the SBI informed Parties that, in response to requests from several Parties, the secretariat would prepare an information note on the evolving functions and operations of the secretariat in the light of decision 1/CP.21.¹

2. Responding to that mandate, this note discusses foreseeable functions and operations of the secretariat in the light of decision 1/CP.21, taking into account experience in implementing existing related mandates.

3. Further, on 18 July 2016, the new Executive Secretary of the secretariat took office. The Executive Secretary would like to use this note to share with Parties her vision of the evolving role of the secretariat over the coming years. She is committed to engaging all Parties in developing the UNFCCC budget for 2018–2019 to ensure that it meets the needs of Parties and achieves the objectives of the historic Paris Agreement.²

B. Possible action by the Subsidiary Body for Implementation

4. The SBI is invited to consider the information contained in this document and to provide guidance to the secretariat in developing the UNFCCC budget proposal for the biennium 2018–2019.

II. Background: climate change architecture, role of the secretariat and resources

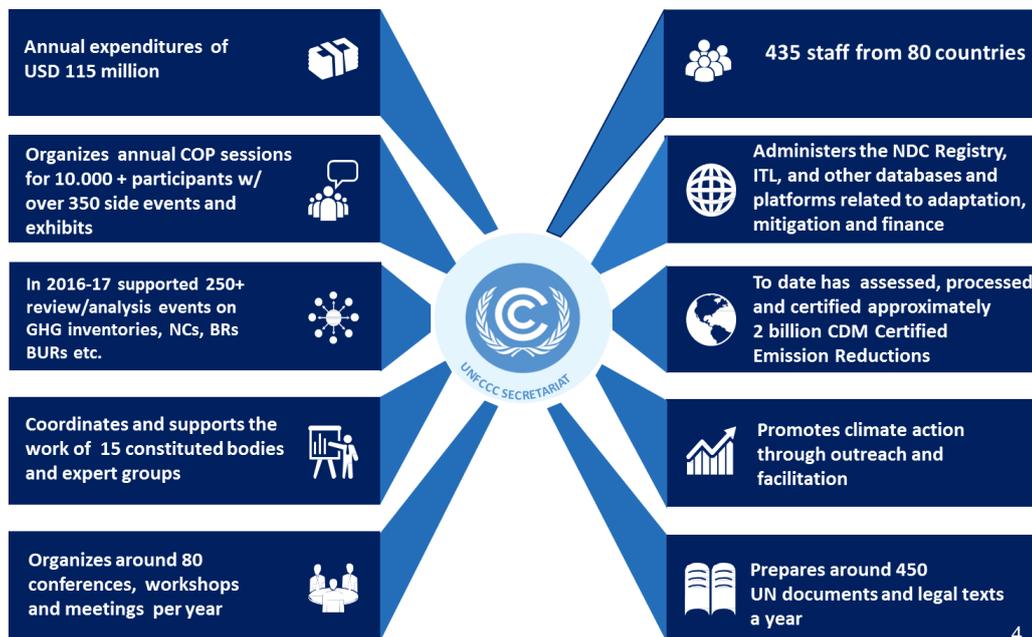
5. The UNFCCC secretariat services the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, its Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement.

6. Over 20 years of progress in the UNFCCC process have generated substantial mandates that the secretariat implements. The implementation of those mandates requires a considerable scale of operations, as illustrated in figure 1, which presents a non-exhaustive list of services currently provided by the secretariat to support Parties and stakeholders in their efforts to act on climate change.

¹ FCCC/SBI/2016/8, paragraph 171.

² For further information, see <<http://unfccc.int/9928.php>>.

Figure 1
UNFCCC secretariat facts and figures



Abbreviations: BRs = biennial reports, BURs = biennial update reports, CDM = clean development mechanism, COP = Conference of the Parties, GHG = greenhouse gas, ITL = international transaction log, NCs = national communications, NDC = nationally determined contribution.

7. Progress in the UNFCCC process has shaped the functions of the secretariat as well as the type and nature of the services provided by it to Parties and stakeholders.

A. Expanding scope of work

8. Over the years, the role of the secretariat has evolved and expanded in three phases:

- (a) Initial focus mainly on supporting the intergovernmental process, to also;
- (b) Implementing the architecture of the climate regime, and increasingly to;
- (c) Mobilizing enhanced action.

9. The distinct role of supporting the intergovernmental process has been the core function of the secretariat.

10. With the entry into force of the Kyoto Protocol and the operationalization of the Marrakesh Accords, the secretariat's implementation responsibilities increased significantly, especially with regard to the carbon market and reporting, review and data management.

11. Meanwhile, negotiations continued and even intensified under the Ad Hoc Working Group on Further Commitments for Annex I Parties under the Kyoto Protocol, the Ad Hoc Working Group on Long-term Cooperative Action under the Convention and the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action, while implementation and technical activities carried on in parallel.

12. Key achievements of the UNFCCC negotiations include:

- (a) The adoption by Parties of modalities, procedures, mechanisms and other arrangements related to the reporting and review of data on greenhouse gas emissions, and measurement, reporting and verification systems;
- (b) The creation of a global carbon market;
- (c) The establishment of:
 - (i) The Adaptation Framework;
 - (ii) The Green Climate Fund;
 - (iii) The Standing Committee on Finance;
 - (iv) The Technology Mechanism;
 - (v) The Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage associated with Climate Change Impacts;
- (d) Arrangements for intended nationally determined contributions (INDCs);
- (e) REDD-plus;³
- (f) The work programme on long-term finance;
- (g) The technical examination process.

13. Almost all of the achievements listed above resulted in mandates for the secretariat to implement activities. As a result, the functions and operations of the secretariat have expanded over time and become more technical and specialized. The secretariat has been mandated to implement the architecture of the climate regime by applying modalities, procedures, mechanisms and other arrangements established by Parties, and by providing technical and operational support to 15 constituted bodies and expert groups created by Parties.

14. Parties in recent years have increasingly acknowledged the importance of mobilizing non-Party stakeholders, including civil society, the private sector, financial institutions, cities and other subnational authorities, local communities and indigenous peoples, in order for the global community to achieve the transition to resilient and low-emission societies.

15. Consequently, the secretariat has supported a number of Party initiatives, such as the technical examination process,⁴ the Adaptation Private Sector Initiative of the Nairobi work programme on impacts, vulnerability and adaptation to climate change,⁵ the Lima–Paris Action Agenda⁶ and the Non-State Actor Zone for Climate Action.⁷ Figure 2 provides an overview of the current scope of work of the secretariat as a result of mandates adopted by Parties.

³ In decision 1/CP.16, paragraph 70, the Conference of the Parties encouraged developing country Parties to contribute to mitigation actions in the forest sector by undertaking the following activities: reducing emissions from deforestation; reducing emissions from forest degradation; conservation of forest carbon stocks; sustainable management of forests; and enhancement of forest carbon stocks.

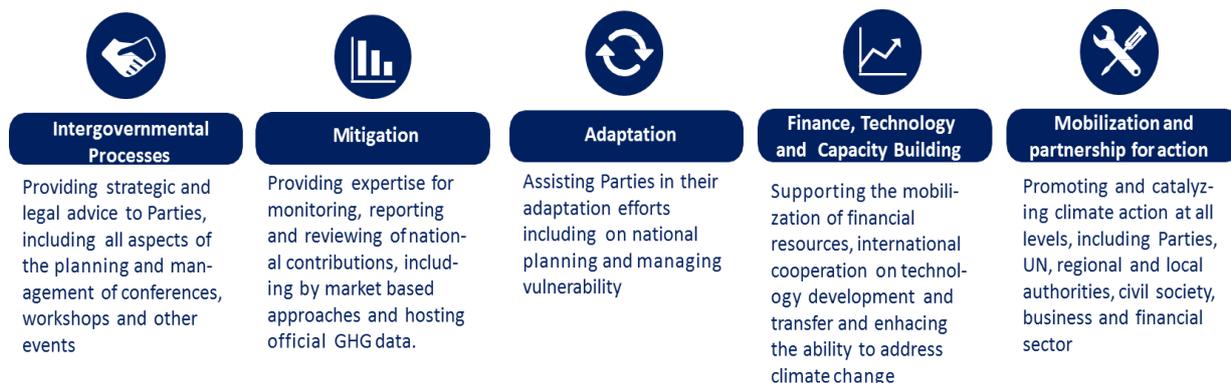
⁴ See decision 1/CP.19, paragraph 5.

⁵ See <<http://unfccc.int/4623.php>>.

⁶ See <<http://newsroom.unfccc.int/lpaa/>>.

⁷ Available at <<http://climateaction.unfccc.int/>>.

Figure 2
Scope of work of the secretariat



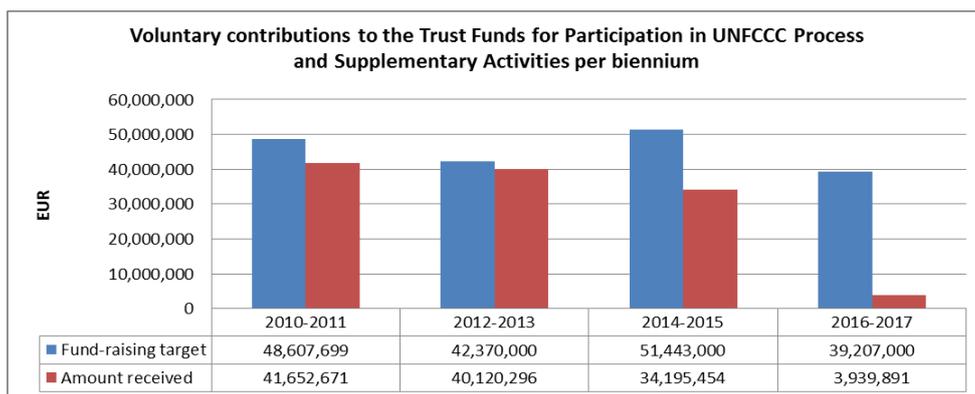
B. Resource constraints and the preparation of the UNFCCC budget for 2018–2019

16. The increasing number of mandates given to the secretariat to support Parties and stakeholders in their efforts to act on climate change has been decoupled from the resources made available to the secretariat to undertake its programme of work.

17. Over previous biennia, the core budget has remained flat and supplementary funding resources have noticeably declined. Figure 3 shows the decrease in contributions to the Trust Fund for Supplementary Activities and the Trust Fund for Participation in the UNFCCC Process over the last three bienniums.

18. The entry into force of the Paris Agreement exacerbated the resource constraints under which the secretariat is currently operating. The secretariat notes that both the adoption of the Paris Agreement and its entry into force took place during the budgetary cycle of 2016–2017, which was approved by decision 22/CP.21 in 2015.⁸

Figure 3
Biennial contributions to the Trust Fund for Supplementary Activities and the Trust Fund for Participation in the UNFCCC Process



⁸ Further information on the budgetary implications of the Paris Agreement and decision 1/CP.21 is available at <https://unfccc.int/files/bodies/cop/application/pdf/budgetary_implication_of_decision_1_cp_21.pdf>.

19. All governments face financial constraints and need to make prudent use of the resources entrusted to them by their citizens. Acknowledging this reality, the Executive Secretary is of the view that the UNFCCC budget for 2018–2019 must ensure economical use of limited resources while meeting the needs of Parties and achieving the objectives of the historic Paris Agreement.

20. For this purpose, the Executive Secretary has invited Parties to engage early in the budgeting process and to provide input on a number of critical issues in developing the budget for 2018–2019, including the approach to integrating Paris Agreement and Convention activities, opportunities for prioritization and synergies, and ways to enhance the clarity of key information in order to better facilitate deliberations by Parties.⁹

21. At the same time, the secretariat has undertaken several efficiency measures to adjust to the new climate change landscape, including: refocusing and redeploying staff expertise and skills to priorities in the Paris Agreement; enhancing secretariat-wide collaboration mechanisms to respond to strategic priorities; adjusting to changes in the carbon market; and transforming information and communication technology (ICT) services. As a result of these measures, the number of secretariat staff has decreased from 506 to 435 over the past 12 months.¹⁰

III. Evolving functions and operations of the secretariat in the light of the Paris Agreement

22. The UNFCCC is and will remain the central forum for providing United Nations system leadership and assisting Parties and other stakeholders in the transformation towards a climate-resilient world.

23. To effectively serve this global forum, the secretariat needs to focus its efforts on:

(a) Supporting Parties in completing the work programme resulting from the relevant requests contained in decision 1/CP.21 (hereinafter referred to as the Paris Agreement work programme);

(b) Supporting Parties in swiftly implementing the Paris Agreement, in particular with regard to turning nationally determined contributions (NDCs) and national adaptation plans into actions, policy interventions and investment plans in the context of broader national development plans and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It will do so without becoming an ‘executing agency’ where other organizations have relevant mandates, expertise and capacity;

(c) Engaging stakeholders. Effective climate action will require the support and commitment of all stakeholders, many of whom have long recognized the risks of inertia and are embracing the opportunity for positive change. The secretariat can add value by connecting stakeholders and sharing information on efforts and best practices;

(d) Looking at the role of the UNFCCC in the context of the United Nations, strengthening its ties with, and its catalysing role among, relevant agencies of the United Nations system to more effectively support governments in integrating climate action with the SDGs;

⁹ As footnote 2 above.

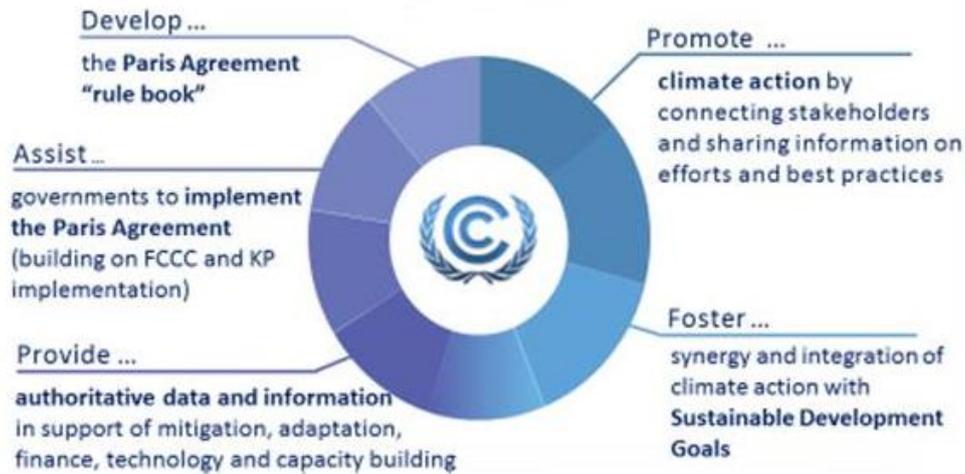
¹⁰ For example, the centralized team that supported the negotiations on the Paris Agreement, which was financed exclusively from supplementary resources, was disbanded after the adoption of the Agreement. The new functions arising from the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Paris Agreement were absorbed within other secretariat programmes.

(e) Providing reliable and authoritative data and information on emissions trajectories and governments’ efforts in relation to mitigation, adaptation and financial support.

24. Figure 4 illustrates the main areas of focus of the secretariat in the light of the Paris Agreement and decision 1/CP.21.

Figure 4

Roles of the UNFCCC and the secretariat in the light of the Paris Agreement



Abbreviations: FCCC = Framework Convention on Climate Change, KP = the Kyoto Protocol.

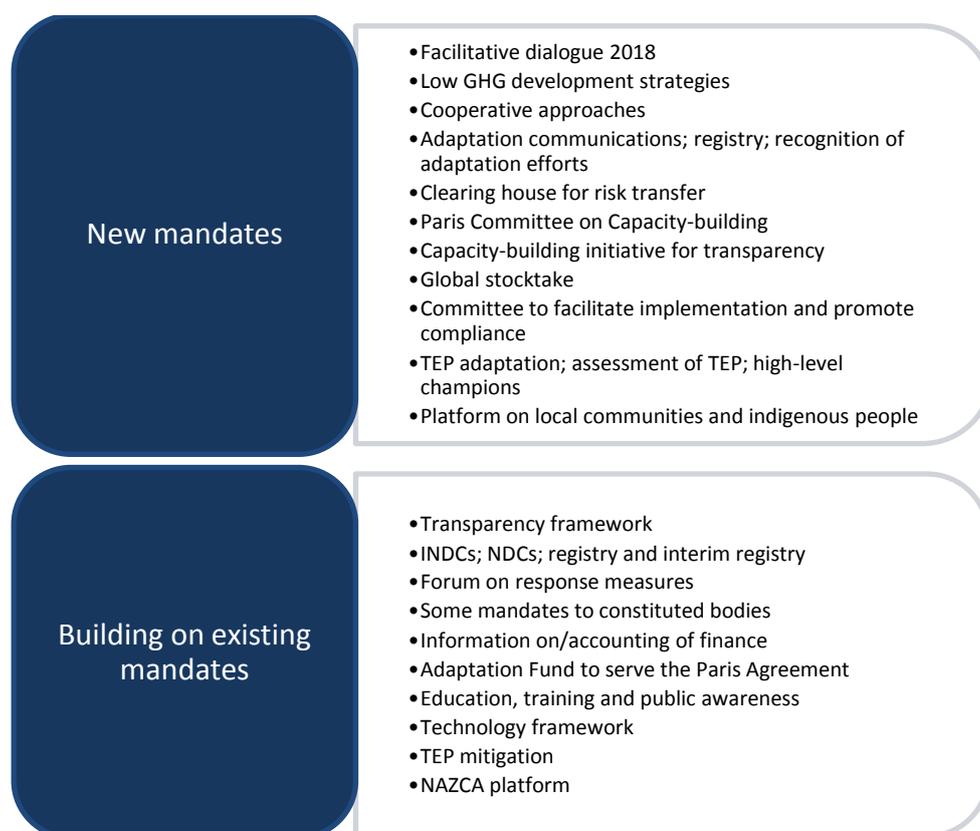
A. Specific mandates for the secretariat arising from the Paris Agreement and decision 1/CP.21

25. The secretariat was mandated to serve the Paris Agreement and to exercise the functions assigned to it under the Agreement and by the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement.¹¹

26. This overarching mandate and the mandates under the Paris Agreement work programme reaffirm and intensify the role of the secretariat, further increasing the scope and complexity of its functions and operations in the future: the provision of support to the intergovernmental process remains central; the implementation of the architecture of the climate regime is taken to a new, more demanding level; and the mobilization of enhanced action emerges as a new and compelling thrust. Figure 5 lists the tasks assigned (directly or indirectly) to the secretariat under decision 1/CP.21.

¹¹ Article 17 of the Paris Agreement.

Figure 5
Tasks assigned to the secretariat under decision 1/CP.21



Abbreviations: GHG = greenhouse gas, INDC = intended nationally determined contribution, NAZCA = Non-State Actor Zone for Climate Action, NDC = nationally determined contribution, TEP = technical examination process.

B. Implementing new mandates and building on existing mandates

27. As presented in figure 5, many of the tasks assigned to the secretariat under decision 1/CP.21 build on existing mandates. Given the financial constraints of governments, the tremendous challenge set by the many mandates under the Paris Agreement and the need to prioritize activities, the Executive Secretary is of the view that, in preparing the UNFCCC budget for 2018–2019, there is an opportunity to identify synergies between such activities in order to maximize their impact and deliver them without undue incremental cost.

28. At the same time, other tasks assigned to the secretariat under decision 1/CP.21 are new and additional. These are critical elements of the Paris Agreement as well and their implementation should not be put at risk by funding them exclusively through supplementary resources.

29. Further, reflecting on the secretariat's experience in implementing existing mandates provides a sound basis for preparing projections and scenarios to use in developing the UNFCCC budget for 2018–2019.

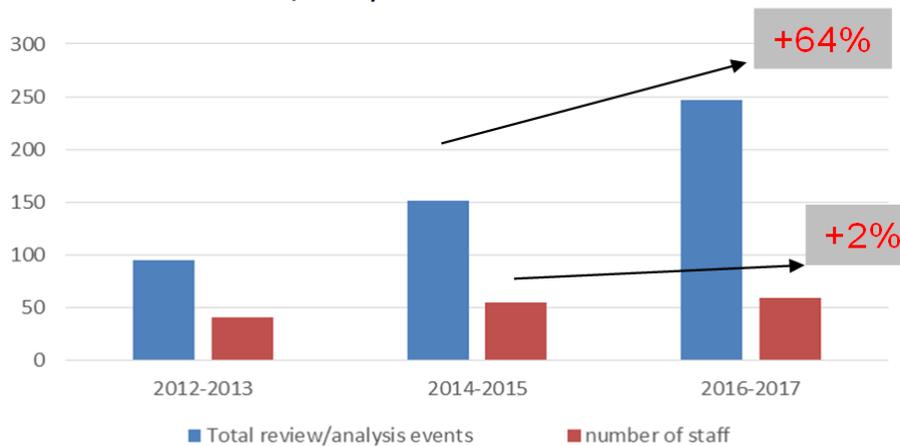
1. Developing the rule book of the Paris Agreement

30. In order to illustrate the challenges in implementing relevant mandates under the Paris Agreement, a case study focusing on the existing regime for measurement, reporting and verification is presented in box 1. Article 13 of the Paris Agreement established an enhanced transparency framework for action and support that will build on and enhance the transparency arrangements under the Convention.

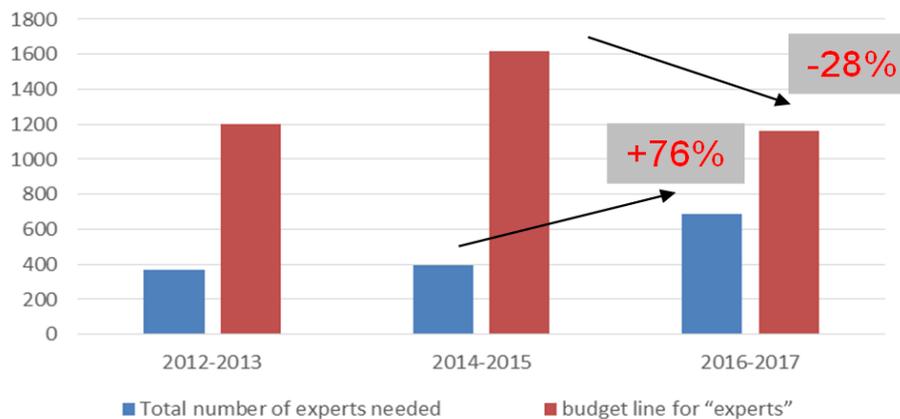
Box 1

Case study: effect of the implementation of the existing regime for measurement, reporting and verification on the functions and operations of the secretariat

Review/analysis events vs. staff



Number of experts vs. budget for experts



The initial mandated activities under the Convention included the in-depth review of national communications of Parties included in Annex I to the Convention (Annex I Parties) and the review of annual greenhouse gas inventory submissions of Annex I Parties.^a From 2003, with the implementation of additional mandates stemming from the Kyoto Protocol,^b the number of tasks related to the existing reporting and review process started to grow significantly. The number of review reports doubled in the review periods 2003–2005 and 2007–2009.^c

After 2010, with the implementation of the measurement, reporting and verification provisions of the Cancun Agreements, the number of mandated activities implemented by the secretariat almost tripled compared with in the

previous review period.^d

While the existing regime for measurement, reporting and verification constitutes a key element of the climate architecture agreed by Parties (and shall serve as a basis for the enhanced transparency framework established by the Paris Agreement), its implementation is increasingly dependent on supplementary income, critically affecting the mandated functions and operations of the secretariat.

^a For in-depth reviews of national communications of Annex I Parties, see <<http://unfccc.int/2711.php>>; for inventory review reports, see <<http://unfccc.int/9477.php>>.

^b The initial review reports for the first commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol were published in 2007 and 2008; further information is available at <<http://unfccc.int/3765.php>>. Initial reviews for the second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol are planned for 2016; further information is available at <<http://unfccc.int/9499.php>>.

^c The selected indicative periods of three years (2003–2005, 2007–2009 and 2014–2016) encompass activities within one cycle of review-related activities mandated to the secretariat.

^d These activities relate to the implementation of the international assessment and review process and the international consultation and analysis process, together with the reviews related to the completion of the first commitment period and the commencement of the second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol. Information on the international assessment and review process and the international consultation and analysis process can be found at <<http://unfccc.int/9534.php>>.

2. Supporting constituted bodies

31. Another aspect of the implementation of the Paris Agreement and decision 1/CP.21 relates to the support to be provided by the secretariat to constituted bodies.

32. The Paris Agreement and decision 1/CP.21 gave additional mandates to five existing constituted bodies, namely the Adaptation Committee,¹² the Executive Committee of the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage associated with Climate Change Impacts,¹³ the Least Developed Countries Expert Group,¹⁴ the Standing Committee on Finance¹⁵ and the Technology Executive Committee.¹⁶

33. In addition, by decision 1/CP.21, two new constituted bodies were established: the Paris Committee on Capacity-building¹⁷ and the committee to facilitate implementation and promote compliance.¹⁸

34. In order to inform the preparation of the UNFCCC budget for 2018–2019, box 2 briefly describes the experience of the implementation of the Adaptation Committee and its impact on the functions and operations of the secretariat.

¹² Decision 1/CP.21 paragraphs 41, 42, 45 and 130.

¹³ Decision 1/CP.21 paragraphs 48 and 49.

¹⁴ Decision 1/CP.21 paragraphs 41 and 45.

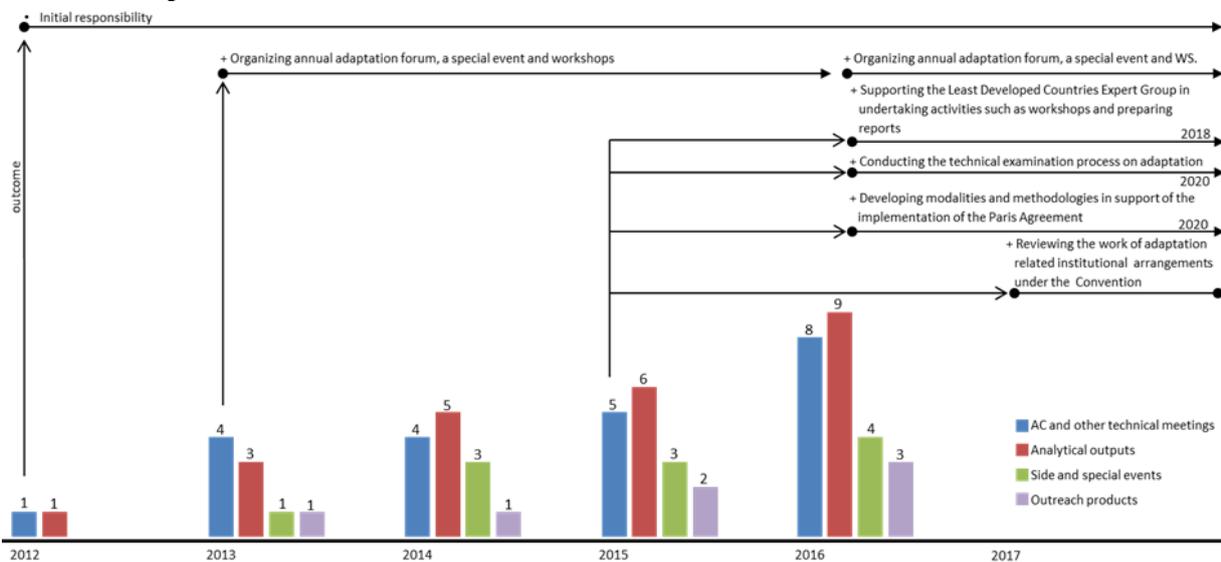
¹⁵ Decision 1/CP.21 paragraph 45.

¹⁶ Decision 1/CP.21 paragraphs 66 and 109.

¹⁷ Decision 1/CP.21 paragraphs 71.

¹⁸ Article 15 of the Paris Agreement.

Box 2
Case study: effect of the implementation of the Adaptation Committee on the functions and operations of the secretariat



Abbreviations: AC = Adaptation Committee, WS = workshops.

The Adaptation Committee (AC) was established in 2010 as part of the Cancun Adaptation Framework.^a In preparing its initial workplan (for 2013–2015), Parties requested the AC to take into account a list of nine indicative activities and to organize its work into three distinct workstreams.^b

During the implementation of the 2013–2015 workplan, Parties requested the AC to undertake additional activities, including organizing annual adaptation forums, a special event and further workshops.^c

The secretariat provided technical and operational support for an average of two meetings a year plus the forums and special event, technical workshops, three published reports, a database of regional centres and numerous background papers.^d

The workplan for 2016–2018 is similar in scope and number of activities to the previous workplan.^e In addition, under decision 1/CP.21, the AC was tasked with:

- Developing modalities and methodologies in support of the implementation of the Paris Agreement in the areas of assessing adaptation needs, recognizing adaptation efforts of developing countries, facilitating the mobilization of support for adaptation, and reviewing the adequacy and effectiveness of adaptation and support;
- Reviewing, in 2017, the work of adaptation-related institutional arrangements under the Convention, with a view to identifying ways of enhancing the coherence of the work;
- Conducting a technical examination process on adaptation from 2016 to 2020, including holding technical expert meetings on adaptation and preparing technical papers;
- Supporting the Least Developed Countries Expert Group in undertaking activities such as workshops and preparing reports in the context of the review of the national adaptation plans in 2018.

To enable the implementation of these additional requests, the secretariat was requested to organize new technical meetings, undertake additional substantial analytical work and coordinate further outreach and collaboration with stakeholders.

^a Decision 1/CP.16, paragraph 13.

^b Decision 2/CP.17, annex V, and decision 11/CP.18.

^c Decision 1/CP.18, decision 16/CP.19 and SBI 40 conclusions as contained in document FCCC/SBI/2014/8, para. 106.

^d An overview of the achievements of the AC during the period 2012–2015 is available at

<http://unfccc.int/files/adaptation/application/pdf/or_lowres.pdf>.

^e Decision 3/CP.21.

C. Providing continued support to the intergovernmental process

38. The intergovernmental process that led to the Paris Agreement represents a period of intense negotiations. The operations of the secretariat in recent years reflect this. While it may be expected that the number of sessions per year will now decrease compared with in previous years and return to the norm that has always been used for budgeting purposes, it is likely that the level of support required of the secretariat, in terms of both substantive support and conference services, will remain significant.

39. The scope of decision 1/CP.21 and its timelines, the upcoming entry into force of the Paris Agreement and the implementation of new processes, in particular the global stocktake, suggest a fairly intensive intergovernmental process up until 2020 and even beyond, as the first global stocktake will take place in 2023.¹⁹

40. In terms of levels of participation and related conference services required, statistics related to the sessions in 2016 suggest that the size of UNFCCC conferences will remain significant. Considering that 2015 was an exceptional year in terms of climate change negotiations, the decreases in the overall number of participants, number of in-session meetings and number of official side events at the May 2016 sessions in comparison with the June 2015 sessions are relatively moderate (by 18–20 per cent). The increase of 16 per cent in the number of in-session official documents illustrates the intensity of the work ahead.

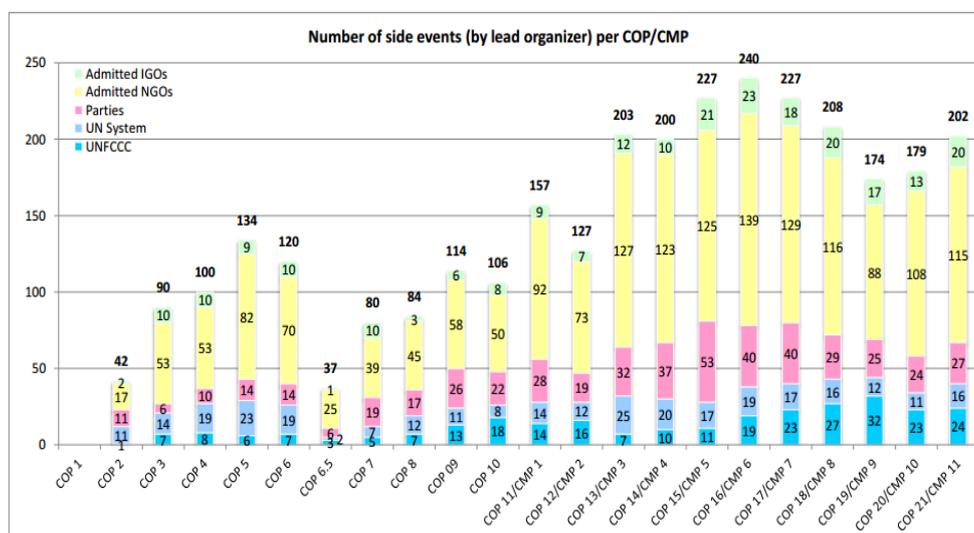
41. Levels of participation are also an indicator that the mobilization of enhanced action is a new and compelling thrust. The number of admitted observer organizations almost doubled in the last eight years, reaching 2,000 in 2015. Nominations by observer organizations to attend sessions of the Conference of the Parties (COP) have regularly exceeded 10,000 since 2009, reaching 24,500 for COP 21 and approximately 20,000 for COP 22. With the recognition in decision 1/CP.21 of the efforts of non-Party stakeholders to address and respond to climate change,²⁰ it is expected that their engagement will continue and grow.

42. The increased mobilization of non-Party stakeholders can also be observed in the growing number of side events, including opportunities for showcasing action, at COP sessions. These events complement the intergovernmental process, further enriching the implementation of the climate regime and stimulating climate action. Figure 7 shows the increase in the number of side events over the years.

¹⁹ Paris Agreement, Article 14.

²⁰ Decision 1/CP.21, paragraph 133.

Figure 7
Number of side events per session of the Conference of the Parties and the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol



Abbreviations: CMP = Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol, COP = Conference of the Parties, IGO = intergovernmental organization, NGO = non-governmental organization.

43. Further consideration of adequate approaches to engagement and cooperation may be needed in the light of foreseeable constraints, including available infrastructure and resources.

D. Catalysing climate action in the context of sustainable development

44. In 2015, the global community converged on an integrated vision for the future articulated through the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.²¹ Taken together, they present one common vision for the well-being of all peoples and set in motion the economic, societal and environmental transformation needed to realize that vision.

45. The deep synergy between the Agreement and the 2030 Agenda requires a structural transformation that will enable national governments to integrate climate action and the 17 SDGs of the 2030 Agenda. Action on climate change is fundamental to achieving sustainable development. Efforts on both fronts cannot be pursued in isolation but must be well integrated, at both the international and national level.

46. The synergy between the Agreement and the 2030 Agenda is manifested in the policies and measures that national governments have committed to in their NDCs and national adaptation plans. They are the vehicles that will allow national governments to turn planning into actions, policy interventions and investment plans.

47. For this purpose, in addition to facilitating the mobilization of support for the preparation and communication of the INDCs, NDCs and adaptation communications of developing country Parties, the secretariat is expected to provide support to developing country Parties to help them to increase their ability to participate effectively in the implementation of the Paris Agreement.

²¹ See <http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E>.

48. The secretariat is also expected to provide technical assistance and operational support to the institutions serving the Agreement in order to enhance the coordination and delivery of resources for supporting country-driven strategies.

49. The transformation needed to realize the vision of the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda will also need to leverage unprecedented universal action, involving all actors at all levels and in all regions of the world.

50. The Paris Agreement recognizes the importance of the engagement of all levels of government and various actors in addressing climate change. Further, the COP welcomes and encourages concrete action by non-Party stakeholders, and decision 1/CP.21, paragraphs 105–136, contains specific provisions on enhanced action by all stakeholders.

51. In addition, by decision 1/CP.21, paragraph 122, the COP established two high-level champions, which the secretariat is required to support.

52. Further, looking at the role of the UNFCCC in the context of the United Nations system, the Executive Secretary is of the view that the secretariat needs to strengthen its ties with relevant United Nations agencies in order to more effectively support governments in integrating climate action with the SDGs.

53. In this context, the role of the secretariat must continue to evolve in order to assist governments and all stakeholders in the rapid undertaking of climate action and the swift implementation of the Paris Agreement. While the negotiations of the Agreement required significant effort, its implementation will require a completely different scale of joint efforts.

54. It is the hope of the Executive Secretary that the information contained in this note provides a sound basis for Parties to consider a UNFCCC budget for 2018–2019 that fully meets the needs of Parties and is in line with the objectives of the historic Paris Agreement.
