

ACE Activity Series 2026

From Local Action to Global Impact

How subnational and local governments drive just and inclusive climate ambition and implementation through Action for Climate Empowerment

23 April 2026

CW3

Yeosu, Republic of Korea

Key messages

- Climate action is most effective when it is rooted in the lived realities, priorities and participation of people and communities. Subnational and local governments play a critical role in translating global climate goals into inclusive and locally relevant action on the ground.
- Action for Climate Empowerment (ACE) supports climate ambition and implementation by enabling communities to become active co-creators of climate solutions rather than passive beneficiaries.
- The event highlighted a growing range of practical approaches to ACE implementation at the subnational and local level, often amplified through the work of international and regional coalitions, networks and partnerships.
- Participants emphasized that just and inclusive transitions require sustained investment in ACE measures, accessible financing, stronger multi-stakeholder partnership and enhanced coordination between national and subnational actors.
- Discussions further underscored the importance of inclusive participation, locally adapted approaches and the integration of Indigenous and local knowledge, alongside accessible and trusted climate communication, to build trust, strengthen ownership and support long-term climate resilience and implementation.

Background

Subnational and local governments play a critical role in translating global climate goals into tangible action on the ground. Bringing together policymakers, practitioners, and partners across levels of governance, this open event at Climate Week 3 explored how cities and regions can advance climate ambition and implementation by integrating the six Action for Climate Empowerment (ACE) elements – climate change education, public awareness, training, public participation, public access to information and international cooperation – in their efforts to deliver just and inclusive transitions. The recording and presentation are available on the [UNFCCC website](#).

As part of the ACE Activity Series 2026, this event will contribute to the midterm review of the Glasgow work programme on ACE. The event is also organized as part of the [ACE Hub](#), with the support of the German State Government of North Rhine-Westphalia.

Opening

The representative of the **incoming COP 31 Presidency** described COP 31 as a “COP of implementation” focused on action delivery and measurable outcomes and highlighted ACE as a driving force for implementation and a cross-cutting enabler for the COP 31 Presidency’s Action Agenda. The representative emphasized that ACE and its six elements are critical to strengthening capacities, enabling participation and ensuring inclusivity. Referring to the upcoming midterm review of the Glasgow work programme, COP 31 will serve as a moment for reflection, recalibration and acceleration of ACE implementation. The representative also shared Türkiye’s local climate action plans, which is an example of effective delivery mechanisms for climate adaptation, enabling inclusive and data-driven local action.

Another representative of the **incoming COP 31 Presidency** highlighted the role of ACE in empowering individuals and communities to contribute to climate action and noted the importance of reflecting on progress under the Glasgow work programme and developing a new action plan focused on specific, measurable outcomes. Highlighting the experience of Australia, the representative further underscored the role of local and subnational governments, as well as the communities within them, in advancing just and inclusive transitions, and invited participants to consider how we can work together globally to act locally through dialogue, consensus and action.

A representative of the **United Cities and Local Governments Asia-Pacific** highlighted the critical role of subnational and local governments in translating the global climate agenda into concrete action at the local level. Emphasizing that subnational and local governments are often the closest democratic interface to communities, they are central to delivering climate action that is effective, just and inclusive. Drawing on examples of ACE implementation from cities across Asia, the representative emphasized the importance of ensuring communities become co-creators of solutions, investing in capacity-strengthening for subnational and local governments to systematically integrate ACE into climate planning and implementation, providing dedicated and accessible funding, particularly for community engagement and social innovations, and enhancing coordination between national and subnational and local governments.

Panel presentations

Following an overview presentation by the secretariat on the role of ACE under the Convention and the Paris Agreement, including the Glasgow work programme, its priority areas and the upcoming midterm review, a panel presented on good practices of ACE implementation in cities and regions.

A representative of the **Climate Group** highlighted the importance of ACE in ensuring that climate action is rooted in people, participation and trust. Speaking from the perspective of the Under2 Coalition, the representative emphasized that meaningful community engagement should be embedded throughout climate planning and implementation processes rather than treated as a separate consultation step. Reference was made to the [Climate Pathways](#) project, which supports subnational governments in developing climate plans through whole-of-society approaches that engage citizens, communities and the private sector from the outset. The representative stressed that public participation and support are essential to advancing climate action, including clean electrification and green industrialization.

The presentation further highlighted examples of community-led and youth-focused initiatives undertaken by subnational governments. These included California’s CAL FIRE Climate Corps programme, which engages young people in climate resilience and wildfire prevention while creating employment pathways, and a youth engagement initiative in the State of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, which combined sports and environmental protection to promote sustainable practices among football fans. The representative also emphasized the role

of trusted local actors, such as libraries, teachers and coaches, in communicating climate-related information and fostering public participation. Concluding the intervention, the representative called for greater integration of ACE into climate planning, increased investment in capacity-building and action, and stronger transparency and accountability systems to build public trust and support effective implementation.

A representative of **Ajou University** and former Vice Chair of the Governing Board of the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning presented examples of how ACE is being implemented in the Republic of Korea's learning cities. Referring to the [UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities](#), the representative highlighted the role of lifelong learning in empowering communities, promoting inclusive participation and advancing sustainable development. Examples from several Korean cities demonstrated how climate action and education are being integrated into local governance, urban planning and community engagement processes. The representative emphasized that learning cities support climate action not only through formal education but also through citizen participation, community-based learning and practical, everyday initiatives.

Examples included the city of Seoul's efforts to advance sustainable mobility, energy access, green building retrofitting and participatory climate governance through initiatives such as its Sustainable Development Strategy through 2045, which was co-developed with citizens and experts. Additional examples from Eunpyeong and Suwon included community-based waste-reduction campaigns, zero-waste schools, neighbourhood climate education initiatives, bicycle campaigns, and other citizen-led carbon-neutrality efforts. The representative emphasized the importance of local leadership, strong political commitment and collaboration among stakeholders in advancing ACE at the local level and fostering climate-resilient and inclusive communities.

A representative of **ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability** presented the “Town Hall COP” initiative as a practical, city-led model for operationalizing the ACE elements at the local level. The representative explained that the initiative brings together local and national governments, communities, youth, academia and civil society to connect international climate processes with local realities and strengthen public understanding of climate action, including nationally determined contributions (NDCs) and outcomes from the UNFCCC process. The initiative was described as a community-led, inclusive platform that promotes ACE through open, accessible dialogue.

The representative noted that more than 50 Town Hall COPs had already been organized in 2025 across 25 countries, engaging over 13,000 participants globally. The initiative was further presented as a mechanism for peer learning, capacity-building and multi-level governance, enabling cooperation among cities, regions and countries while supporting stronger linkages between local implementation and national climate ambitions. Examples from countries including Malaysia, South Africa, Kiribati and Australia were shared to demonstrate how local communities are contributing to climate solutions and informing broader climate governance processes. Concluding the intervention, the representative emphasized that climate action accelerates when informed and empowered communities are actively involved in shaping the solutions they will implement.

A representative of the **Iswe Foundation** presented the work of the [Global Citizens' Assembly](#) as a participatory approach well aligned with ACE, particularly regarding public participation and international cooperation. The representative explained that the initiative brings together citizens from diverse backgrounds through democratic lottery systems to deliberate on climate-related issues and contribute recommendations to climate decision-making processes. Drawing on experiences from the Civic Assembly and community assemblies in countries including Brazil, Mozambique and India, the representative highlighted how citizen-led deliberative processes can strengthen climate literacy, foster solidarity and support more inclusive and informed decision-making.

The presentation emphasized the importance of moving beyond consultation towards meaningful deliberation and shared ownership of climate solutions. Examples were shared of local assemblies addressing issues such as food systems, drought, land rights and community resilience, with a focus on amplifying the voices of those often underrepresented in climate governance processes. The representative further stressed the importance of scaling participation through capacity-building, local facilitation and collaboration with institutions, including the UNFCCC process. Concluding the intervention, the representative highlighted the role of citizen assemblies in building trust, strengthening democratic culture, and supporting just transitions through inclusive, community-driven climate action.

Group discussion

During the group discussion, participants exchanged experiences and lessons learned on how ACE can support climate ambition and implementation across sectors including energy and industry, transport, health, food security, just transition and nature-based solutions at the subnational and local level.

Throughout the discussions, participants emphasized that effective climate action requires inclusive participation, including community engagement and locally tailored approaches that reflect the realities and priorities of communities on the ground. Several examples were shared of efforts to integrate ACE into subnational and local climate planning processes through community consultations, citizen engagement initiatives, education programmes and participatory governance mechanisms. Participants also highlighted the importance of strengthening public understanding of climate action and ensuring that communities are meaningfully involved in implementation processes to foster trust and ownership.

The discussions further underscored the importance of education and training in supporting just and inclusive transitions. Examples included renewable energy and green skills initiatives linked to schools and local communities, as well as efforts to build institutional coordination mechanisms and working groups at the subnational and local level. Participants noted that youth engagement had played an important role in strengthening recognition of youth priorities within national climate processes, including NDCs. Several groups also emphasized the importance of ensuring that climate information, awareness-raising activities and early warning systems are accessible to vulnerable and underrepresented communities, including through the use of local and Indigenous languages and culturally appropriate communication approaches.

A number of common challenges were identified across sectors and regions, including limited institutional and technical capacity, insufficient financing and difficulties in ensuring meaningful participation of vulnerable groups and communities. Participants highlighted the need for stronger coordination between national and subnational and local governments, particularly in integrating national climate priorities into local implementation processes. Discussions also stressed the importance of accessible financing mechanisms for subnational and local governments and communities, as well as stronger transparency and accountability systems to build public confidence and support long-term implementation efforts.

Sector-specific discussions further highlighted the importance of addressing climate-related mental health impacts, strengthening early warning systems and promoting collaborative research and data-sharing initiatives in the health sector. Discussions on food security and nature-based solutions emphasized the importance of local ownership, Indigenous knowledge and practical, action-oriented learning approaches. Participants noted that adaptation measures are most effective when communities are directly involved in their design and implementation, and when local experiences and traditional knowledge are recognized as valuable contributions to climate resilience and sustainable development.