



United Nations

FCCC/TP/2024/1



Framework Convention on
Climate Change

Distr.: General
30 April 2024

English only

Options for increasing the participation of observer organizations from developing countries in the UNFCCC process

Technical paper by the secretariat

Summary

This technical paper presents options for increasing the participation of observer organizations from developing countries, including, but not limited to, providing financial support, as well as options for enhancing the effective and meaningful engagement of observer organizations, in the UNFCCC process.



I. Introduction

A. Mandate and scope

1. The Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI), at its fifty-eighth session, acknowledged the increasing number of observer organizations admitted to the UNFCCC process and the associated challenges in meeting their diverse expectations of meaningful engagement and organizing UNFCCC conferences that can accommodate their increasing number and meet their diverse needs.¹

2. In addition, SBI 58 reiterated the urgent need for solutions to improve the representation of observer organizations from developing countries in the UNFCCC process,² owing to the regional imbalance in terms of admitted intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).³ In this context, it requested the secretariat to prepare a technical paper on options for increasing the participation of observer organizations from developing countries, including, but not limited to, providing financial support,⁴ which are presented in chapter II below. Options for enhancing the effective and meaningful engagement of observer organizations from developing countries are also presented, in chapter II.B below.

B. Possible actions by the Subsidiary Body for Implementation

3. The SBI may wish to consider the options presented herein and provide guidance on increasing the participation and enhancing the engagement of observer organizations, especially from developing countries, in the UNFCCC process.

4. In order for any of the options to be taken forward, the SBI may also wish to first provide guidance as to what would constitute regionally balanced participation of observer organizations.

II. Options for increasing the participation and enhancing the engagement of observer organizations from developing countries in the UNFCCC process

5. The figure below shows the regional distribution of participants representing intergovernmental and non-governmental observer organizations registered for sessions of the Conference of the Parties (COP) in 2012–2023. Between COP 27 and 28, the share of such participants from Asia-Pacific States increased by 10 per cent, while the share from Western European and other States fell by 5 per cent. The figure below indicates that the participation of representatives of observer organizations from a regional group increases when the host country of the COP session is located in that region, but does not necessarily indicate a sufficient increase in the participation of observer organizations from developing countries over time.

6. Options are presented in this paper for addressing the regional imbalance in the participation of observer organizations in the UNFCCC process, in terms of the number of participants and the effectiveness of their engagement. The options include proposals derived from the process of strengthening the engagement of observer organizations in the UNFCCC process.⁵ The options are complementary and should therefore be viewed holistically, as a single action implemented in isolation may not achieve the desired goal. These options may

¹ FCCC/SBI/2023/10, para. 144.

² FCCC/SBI/2023/10, para. 143.

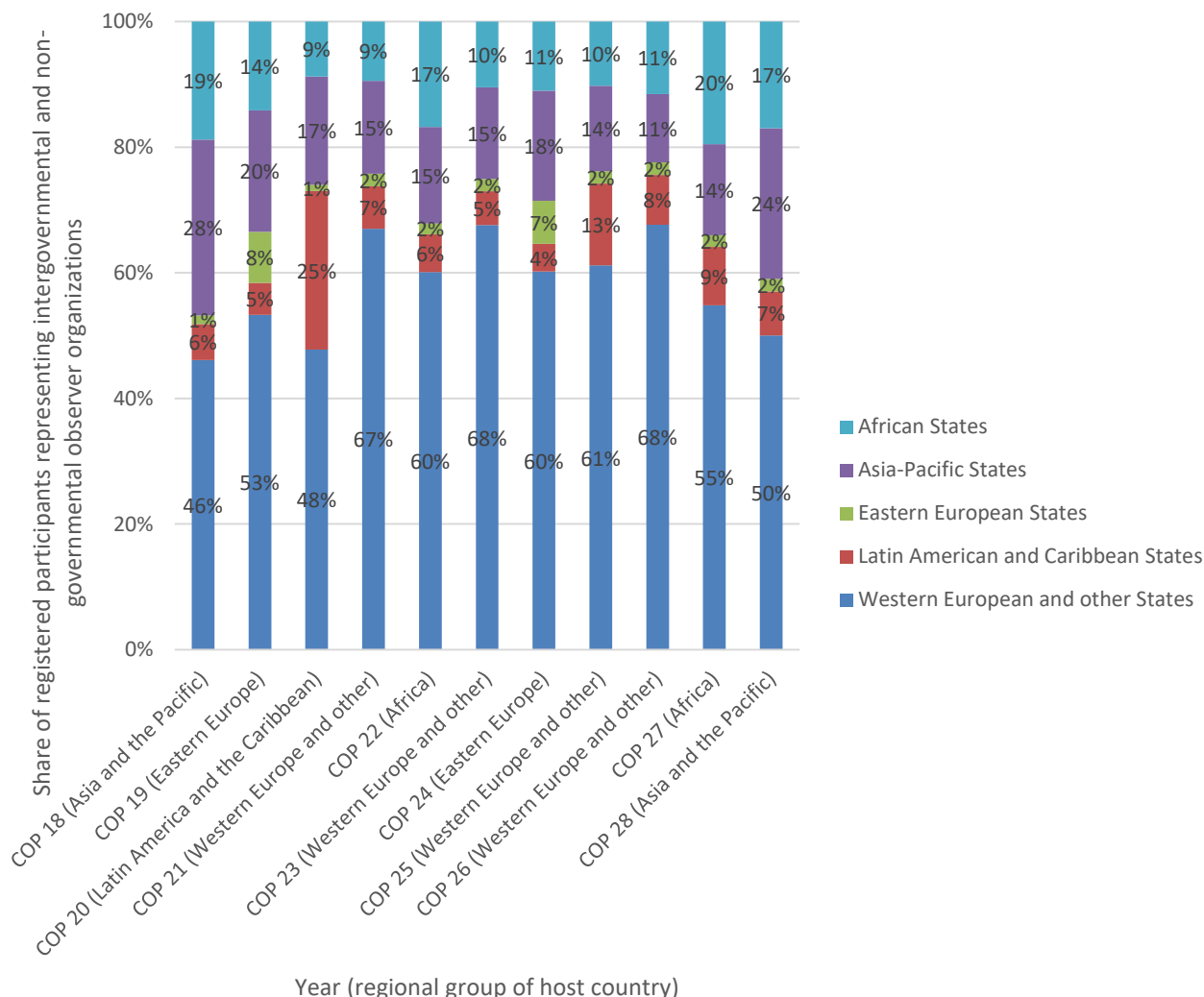
³ FCCC/SBI/2023/INF.5, para. 24.

⁴ FCCC/SBI/2023/10, para. 146(c)(iii).

⁵ See <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/parties-non-party-stakeholders/non-party-stakeholders/overview/process-to-strengthen-observer-engagement-in-the-unfccc-0>.

also be useful in addressing imbalances in the participation of representatives of Indigenous Peoples, children and youth, and women and gender organizations in the UNFCCC process.

Regional distribution of participants representing intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations registered for sessions of the Conference of the Parties in 2012–2023



Abbreviation: COP = Conference of the Parties.

A. Options for addressing the quantitative imbalance in observer organization participation

1. Quotas

7. One option is for the secretariat to develop, on the basis of guidance from Parties referred to in paragraph 4 above, criteria for quota allocation that facilitate achieving a balance in the regional distribution of representatives of observer organizations. The secretariat could:

- (a) Consider prioritizing the participation of observer organization representatives from countries in the regional group of the host country of the COP session if that region is underrepresented within the distribution of observer organization participants, for example by having an admitted organization from the host country act as an umbrella organization through which local stakeholders can be nominated, thus acknowledging the importance of local stakeholder participation;

(b) Consider changes to the online registration system by introducing the possibility for observer organisations to withdraw all or part of their request for a quota in situations where they do not intend to use their allocated quota. Withdrawn allocations could be reallocated to observer organizations from developing countries. As redundancy is taken into account when initially allocating the quota, this would mean that the initial quota would have to be set at a lower level;

(c) Collect information on each observer organization, such as the primary focus and/or the type of stakeholder represented, in order to enable the secretariat to prioritize allocating quotas to organizations supporting underrepresented groups;

(d) Continue adjusting quotas to ensure more diverse observer organizations are represented and prioritizing requests to increase quota allocations for observer organizations from developing countries.

8. The secretariat could also encourage each observer organization to prioritize including representatives from developing countries in their delegations to UNFCCC sessions, for example by ensuring that a certain minimum percentage of delegates are from developing countries, with observer organizations with the most balanced delegations in terms of such representation given due consideration in quota allocation for the subsequent UNFCCC session.

9. Another option relates to the high demand for large quotas from pavilion hosts. As it stands, observer organizations that can afford a pavilion often request to be allocated quotas for hundreds of participants in order to secure panellists and speakers given the lack of information on confirmed participants during the programme planning phase. The provisional list of participants should be used by pavilion hosts to reach out to participants already confirmed by other observer organizations, including those from developing countries, which in turn could help to reduce the quotas requested by pavilion hosts and enable the secretariat to allocate saved quota to observer organizations, including from developing countries, that may not have the resources to host pavilions.

10. The secretariat could also prioritize the assessment of applications for admission to the UNFCCC process from observer organizations from the region of the Presidency if that region is underrepresented within the distribution of observer organization participants, thereby ensuring that, if a limited number of applications can be assessed within the secretariat's projected resources, the assessment of applications from those observer organizations are prioritized and thus completed in time for the respective COP session. However, since applications are assessed in the order of the application date, this option may result in the assessment of applications made earlier being postponed to future assessment cycles if the secretariat's resources are not increased to accommodate a higher number of assessed cases per assessment cycle.

11. Another option is for the secretariat to consolidate observer status of all affiliated organizations (regional, national or subnational offices, branches, chapters, etc.), even if they are separately incorporated in different countries.⁶ This would reduce the number of organizations that require quota allocation and enable the secretariat to allocate the additional quota to observer organizations from developing countries.

12. Another option is for the secretariat to develop a comprehensive taxonomy of regions and subregions and their representation among observer organizations. These data could then be used to improve the regional and subregional balance of observer organization participation by allocating larger quotas to organizations from underrepresented regions and subregions.

2. Financial support

13. Parties may wish to consider establishing a trust fund to support the participation at UNFCCC sessions of observer organizations from developing countries that meet specific criteria set out by Parties. The establishment of such a trust fund would not only address the

⁶ For example, national and subnational bar associations could be nominated to participate by the International Bar Association.

financial barriers that often hinder the participation of observer organizations from developing countries, but also incentivize observer organizations to meet those specific criteria and therefore align their activities and goals with those under the UNFCCC.

14. The secretariat could set fees for the submission of applications for admission as observers to UNFCCC sessions by organizations from developed countries, and/or an annual fee for admitted observer organizations from developed countries determined on the basis of their annual revenue, with proceeds allocated to the trust fund referred to in paragraph 12 above.

15. Parties may also wish to provide information on opportunities for bilateral funding, which the secretariat could compile and make available to observer organizations from developing countries. This would incentivize observer organizations to identify and pursue funding opportunities that align with their objectives and priorities.

16. Host countries of COP sessions may wish to combine the provision of financial support for participation with capacity-building support for funded participants. Such initiatives have been successfully undertaken in the past; for example, the COP 28 Presidency allocated funding for two representatives per NGO constituency and 100 youth delegates to attend the session in addition to offering capacity-building sessions for youth delegates throughout 2023.

3. Visas

17. Observer organizations have reported that the electronic visa system used at COP 28 has helped to mitigate some of the challenges they have faced in obtaining visas for attending UNFCCC sessions and mandated events. The secretariat could continue encouraging host countries to adopt electronic visa systems, thereby simplifying the visa application process and eliminating the necessity for visa appointments.

18. In the event that a host country does not adopt an electronic visa system, it could consider offering fast-track visa appointments in its embassies in developing countries in the interest of timely issuance of visas,⁷ thereby giving participants adequate time to make travel arrangements.

4. Virtual participation

19. Parties may wish to provide finance for the UNFCCC virtual conference platform, irrespective of whether or not global events that may hinder in-person participation, such as a pandemic, have occurred, to enable representatives of observer organizations, particularly those from developing countries, who are unable to attend in person to participate in meetings and engage with other participants virtually.⁸

B. Options for enhancing the effectiveness of the engagement of observer organizations from developing countries

1. Capacity-building

20. One option is for the secretariat to continue providing regular capacity-building sessions to stakeholders, in particular representatives of women and gender, and children and youth organizations, and observer organizations from developing countries, focused on enhancing their capacity to engage effectively in UNFCCC sessions, navigate the process of obtaining status as an observer organization and understand the structure of NGO constituencies in order to facilitate engagement. Similar sessions could also be provided for such stakeholders at the regional level at regional events and through the regional collaboration centres.

21. Parties may wish to strengthen the capacity of observer organizations to report on and advocate for climate change matters in order to scale up community-driven initiatives

⁷ In accordance with document FCCC/SBI/2023/10, para. 125.

⁸ In accordance with document FCCC/SBI/2021/16, para. 114(d)(ii). See also para. 110 of that document.

addressing climate change. This could entail training observer organizations in strategies to enhance reporting and equipping them with the knowledge and tools to collect, analyse and communicate climate change data and information at the local level, including on climate change impacts, mitigation efforts and adaptation strategies, to ensure that local insights and experience are effectively captured. National-level initiatives are important for enhancing the capacity and skills of local actors in this regard, enabling them to actively and meaningfully participate in the UNFCCC process.

22. NGO constituencies and informal groups⁹ could systematically conduct capacity-building and orientation sessions for member observer organizations that are new to the UNFCCC process.

23. NGO constituencies could also consider implementing a voluntary pairing system for a short period of time (e.g. three months), whereby different member observer organizations newly admitted to the UNFCCC process are paired on the basis of certain criteria, for example pairing organizations from developing countries with those from developed countries, or pairing smaller organizations with larger ones. This pairing system would facilitate information- and resource-sharing, provide opportunities for developing alliances and scale up collaboration on climate action.

2. Enhancing effectiveness and meaningfulness of engagement

24. The secretariat could facilitate the equitable representation of observer organizations from developing countries (in addition to the NGO constituency focal points) in engagement activities at UNFCCC sessions and at planning meetings leading up to UNFCCC sessions.

25. The secretariat could also encourage observer organizations to nominate representatives from developing countries when facilitating opportunities for engagement in meetings of UNFCCC constituted bodies and UNFCCC sessions.

26. Parties may wish to enhance the engagement of observer organizations in mandated UNFCCC events, such as by increasing the number of observer organizations actively engaged in each event, with a view to facilitating substantive engagement and a more varied exchange of expertise.

3. Side events and exhibits at UNFCCC sessions

27. The secretariat could continue to prioritize applications for side events and exhibits at UNFCCC sessions from observer organizations from developing countries, as well as other organizations that support underrepresented groups, such as those representing marginalized communities and/or advocating for the disability–climate nexus.

28. The secretariat could also consider prioritizing applications for side events and exhibits at UNFCCC sessions from observer organizations in regions that are underrepresented within the distribution of observer organizations. This would foster a stronger regional presence and balance, help to highlight local perspectives and promote discussion on regional priorities and strategies.

4. Action by countries hosting UNFCCC sessions

29. Host countries of COP sessions may wish to allocate pavilion spaces to certain constituencies, particularly those that engage with developing country observer organizations.

30. Host countries may also wish to enhance simultaneous interpretation facilities throughout the conference venue, including side event rooms, and provide interpretation services at an affordable rate to address language barriers affecting observer organization representatives from developing countries.

31. In addition, host countries may wish to engage observer organizations representing underrepresented groups in consultations to ensure that necessary measures are taken to promote inclusivity and accessibility at COP sessions.

⁹ Parliamentarians, faith-based organizations and education, communication and outreach NGOs.

5. Action by Presidencies of the Conference of the Parties, presiding officers of UNFCCC bodies and regional groups

32. Parties and presiding officers of UNFCCC bodies may wish to prioritize the participation of representatives of observer organizations from developing countries in their engagement activities, including at UNFCCC sessions.

33. COP Presidencies may wish to strengthen engagement with representatives of observer organizations from developing countries in Presidency initiatives and events at UNFCCC sessions, while ensuring a gender balance.

34. Coordinators of regional groups may wish to consider facilitating regular meetings with representatives of observer organizations from developing countries to provide a platform for representatives of underrepresented groups to engage directly with regional groups in order to reflect these groups' perspectives in discussions at UNFCCC sessions.
