

This paper recalls the important contribution and influential role of subnational governments in climate action and recommendations to the European Union (EU).

Subnational Governments: Conscientious and influential partners in climate action

An Advocacy Paper

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Network of Regional Governments
for Sustainable Development

Executive Summary

Subnational governments call on the EU to:

- ✓ Be an **ambassador of the territorial dimension of global climate change policies at international instances** such as the **United Nations Framework Convention for Climate Change (UNFCCC)** and, within the **EU's international negotiation strategies**;
- ✓ Further **take advantage of the regions capacity for dialogue and collaboration** with other governance levels and economic and social actors;
- ✓ Enhance the **subnational dimension of all European policies related to climate change** and ensure the **active participation of regional representatives in relevant EU working groups**;
- ✓ Strengthen the **collaboration with subnational governments** in the elaboration of **specific working tools and methodologies** for the **bottom-up deployment of a low carbon economy**;
- ✓ Encourage the regional development of specific climate change action projects, with a view to **climate action being a priority for the post 2013 EU Cohesion Policy**;
Orient the bulk of current and **future EU funding and policies to the empowerment of creativity and innovation in tackling climate change at subnational level**;
- ✓ Encourage actual **networking between regional R&D and innovation actors and EU funded projects on climate action**, in the spirit of the recent "Innovation Union" initiative;
- ✓ Further promote, in close collaboration with the **European Investment Bank** and other **international financial institutions**, the **set-up of climate change, innovation and cooperation funds** fully conducive to the development of EU and UN climate change action mechanisms at subnational scale;
- ✓ Enhance the application of the **triple helix approach**– involvement of **public sector, private sector and academia** – to the climate action capacity building actions the EU carries out with developing countries by further recognising the work of subnational governments in this field.

To complement this advocacy paper, nrg4SD has produced a booklet of regional case studies from members illustrating successful climate action projects. Click [here](#) to download the booklet.





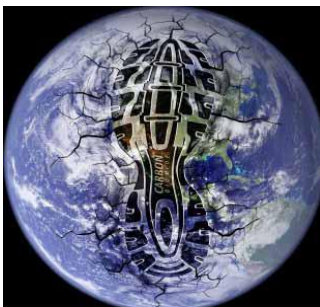
The importance of subnational governments in international climate change agreements

Subnational governments commit individually and collectively - through organisation such as nrg4SD to global challenge of climate change.

Subnational governments are particularly well placed for identifying the needs and the strengths of their societies in their climate action, and they are often responsible for the elaboration and implementation of policy, legislation, programmes fiscal mechanisms and public investments plans in several areas - such as transport, energy, the environment, agriculture, forestry, industry, spatial planning, resource management, technology development and transfer, civil protection or development cooperation - that directly influence Greenhouse Gases (GHG) emissions levels and deal with the impacts of climate change. They also implement the bulk of national, European and international climate change policies and elaborate their own regional economic and climate change strategies.

Subnational governments have the capacity to and the experience of working with other levels of government, third sector bodies, the private sector and the financial institutions in order to find real solutions for real problems. Subnational governments from all over the world have demonstrated in a number of ways that their contribution and leadership is essential to help achieve the ultimate objectives of the United Nations Framework Convention for Climate Change (UNFCCC) since, according to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 50% to 80% of adaptation and mitigation actions necessary to tackle climate change are or will be implemented at the subnational or local levels of governance .

Subnational governments are determined to address the issues of climate change and the economic difficulties many of them are facing by turning these challenges into an opportunity to move towards greener, smarter and more inclusive societies. Under a multilevel governance approach, it is instrumental that subnational governments are placed at the heart of the national, European and international decision-making process.



Becoming a low carbon society: Planning subnational strategies and communicating with citizens in a green, inclusive and smart manner

Subnational governments have an important role to play in the transition to a low carbon and less resource intense economy. It is a huge challenge - keeping the economy of regions active and dynamic whilst moving regions from being “greener” to being “green” so that higher living standards are matched by higher quality of life.

It requires advanced methodologies and innovative approaches for carbon and resources accounting so that investment decisions can be informed by knowledge of a project's carbon footprint and that it can be understood how a decision to be "carbon-free" and "non-resource intense" affects a region's overall economic performance and, thus, traditional notions of living standards.

The challenge is multiple for subnational governments. It involves organising regional economic strategies oriented to low carbon impact and living within environmental limits; as well as developing carbon and resources accounting and mainstreaming it in investment decisions. It also requires citizenship informing and involvement so that the low carbon and low resource intensity ambition becomes a consensus between citizens, businesses, academia and all other sector of society.

Moreover it implies a need for innovative schemes which enable carbon and resources saving to become a part of all streams of citizens' daily life. The list is long. From the competences, experience and political will of regional governments, it follows that regions play an important role in turning the world's transition to a low carbon, less resource intense and more inclusive society into reality, as well as in using the current global economic context as an opportunity to do so.

Subnational governments find that the EU can strengthen the collaboration with them towards this common goal via the elaboration of specific working tools and methodologies for the bottom-up deployment of low carbon and less resource intense economy.



Financing climate action: Encouraging green business and using development aid differently

Subnational governments have the competences and the experience of working with other levels of government, third sector bodies, the private sector and financial institutions in order to find real solutions to real problems.

Subnational governments encourage and support the private sector in the adoption of green practices and voluntary schemes as well as leading interregional partnerships involving the private sector in order to support the implementation of climate action policies and legislation widely, as well as to promote understanding, collaboration and capacity building in climate action.

Subnational governments believe that the EU has the capacity to encourage and support comprehensive regional schemes to mainstream climate change concerns into the industrial and the production and consumption strategies at subnational level.

The EU can further promote, in close collaboration with the European Investment Bank and

other international financial institutions, the setup of climate funds fully conducive to the development of EU and UN climate action mechanisms at subnational scale.

Many subnational governments are committing financial and human resources in North-South cooperation schemes for sharing experiences, technologies and best practices on climate action matters. In this context, within the UN system, the Territorial Approach on Climate Change (TACC) programme is a response to the increasing request from developing regions for adapting to the social, economic and environmental impacts of climate change, and also to the increasing solidarity of developed regions towards building capacity for climate change in other less favoured regions of the World. Subnational governments would however welcome measures for fostering an international environment more conducive to a true North-South collaboration on climate action.

As the major development aid donor at global level, the EU is well placed to enhance the application of the triple helix approach – involvement of public sector, private sector and academia – to the climate action capacity building actions the EU carries out with developing countries by further recognising the work of the subnational governments in this field.



Reducing the knowledge gap: Partnering for scientific research and innovation

Aware of the impact of the knowledge gap on scientific consensus and political decision-making, subnational governments put in place regional research & development and innovation agencies, which identify regional research priorities and implement policies in climate action.

Subnational governments take an active role in establishing collaborative research projects and in creating networks of research actors both at European and international level, where some of these initiatives are also part of wider development cooperation projects with less developed regions.

Subnational governments have the capacity to establish concerted initiatives between the public sector, academia and the private sector in order to encourage a real transfer of knowledge on climate change matters to the regional economic strategies. They particularly welcome EU programmes targeted to the increase of the capacity of regions to invest in and develop their commitment in research, such as the Regions of Knowledge programme or the Regions for Economic Change Initiative.

Yet, large disparities still remain at national and subnational level on R&D capacity for climate action. All regions are facing common challenges linked to climate change and its related consequences - such as energy dependence or demographic changes - for which rigorous R&D capacities, innovative measures and the sharing of these are instrumental.

Subnational governments find that the EU has the capacity to orient the bulk of its current and future funding and policies to empower creativity and innovation at subnational level, which are fundamental in successful climate action. The EU, through the management of funding programmes, is well placed to encourage actual networking between regional R&D and innovation actors and EU funded innovation projects; and in this way increase the EU's climate-change-related skills and competitiveness.



Mitigating and adapting to climate change impacts: Finding real solutions to real problems

Subnational governments have competences in the field of the environment, energy, transport, industry, agriculture and land & resources management, which are responsible for a significant amount of greenhouse gas emissions. They also implement the bulk of national and international climate change policies and elaborate their own and climate mitigation and adaptation strategies. In complement, their closeness to citizens and to the implementation level, gives regions a privileged position for identifying the needs, strengths and resilience capacity of our societies in climate action.

Regarding mitigation, subnational governments encourage, set and implement, amongst others, GHG emissions targets, green public procurement policies, waste management & treatment strategies, energy efficient buildings initiatives, sustainable mobility and clean transport plans, sustainable agriculture and forest practices, and in some cases fiscal incentives in support of these initiatives. The list is longer and it is very often part of wider regional strategies for green, inclusive and smart growth policies.

In a similar way, regarding adaptation, subnational governments encourage, support and deploy, for instance, education and awareness campaigns; information gathering systems on climate conditions; air and water quality monitoring and management; tools to identify and assess risks and vulnerable areas; risk prevention and reduction strategies; civil protection action plans, including disaster response, reconstruction and relief actions; or health care programmes for elderly and vulnerable citizens.

Subnational governments believe that the EU can be an ambassador of the subnational dimension of global adaptation and mitigation climate change policies. The EU also has the capacity to enhance the territorial dimension of all European policies related to climate action and ensure the active participation of regional representatives in relevant EU working groups. Last but not least, the EU can play a crucial role in the dissemination and knowledge sharing of subnational mitigation and adaptation measures.



The **Network of Regional Governments for Sustainable Development, nrg4SD** works tirelessly to champion the work of subnational governments on sustainable development, including climate action. As an International non-profit organisation representing subnational governments (namely federated states and regional governments) at the global level, nrg4SD promotes understanding, partnerships and projects in sustainable development and seeks greater international recognition of the important contribution of subnational governments towards sustainable development. A Member of the Organisations des Régions Unies-Forum Global d'Associations de Régions (ORU-FOGAR), nrg4SD is the voice of ORU-FOGAR in the field of sustainable development.

nrg4SD is an accredited observer with the UNFCCC as part of the constituency for Local Government and Municipal Authorities (LGMA).

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