

Multilevel climate governance: A key to leadership

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.

In the last years, subnational governments have concretely shown that they take their climate change responsibilities in a more proactive way than ever before. In fact, their accomplishments in this area have grown tremendously in sophistication and effectiveness. And even in the current economic context, subnational governments remain determined to address the challenges of climate change by turning them into an opportunity to move towards greener, smarter and more inclusive societies.

Indeed, the proximity of subnational governments to their citizens; their long-track experience in engaging directly with different levels of government and a wide range of stakeholders; and their direct experience with the risks and impacts that climate change phenomena have on their respective communities, constitute an incomparable sounding board and hub for any new climate action institutions.

Either through powersharing arrangements or constitutional attribution of powers, subnational governments are often responsible for legislative, economic and fiscal competences. These competences influence GHG emissions levels, address climate change adaptation, favour private investments in green technologies and support decentralised cooperation on climate matters.

These important lessons being learned at the subnational level complement constructively national and international climate efforts and contribute to shaping ambitious and innovative responses to climate change at the grass roots level. Yet, the insertion of mechanisms for multilevel climate governance under international climate agreements remains occasional.



The recognition of local and subnational governments as “governmental stakeholders”, as enshrined in the Cancun Agreements at COP16, should constitute the basis for moving towards the establishment of new deeper and formal “partnerships” with subnational governments and local authorities based on commitment and accountability, which will reflect their governmental nature and recognise them as the allies they truly are, in accordance with the needs of a modern multilevel climate governance model.

The operationalisation of the new institutions enshrined in the Cancun Agreements constitutes a clear opportunity to engage with the grass-roots experience and long-term reflections on climate action of subnational government.

The human, economic and environmental challenge that goes hand in hand with climate change is crying out for international and national governance structures capable of reflecting, amongst other aspects, the crucial role of subnational governments towards multilevel, complementary and consistent climate governance. In good and modern multilevel governance relies the key for understanding globalisation and its huge challenge of climate change in terms of opportunities. And in this positive reading of the challenges of the XXI century resides also the key for generating climate action leadership guided by ambition and realism.