

Non-governmental organization constituencies

What are constituencies?

In the intergovernmental negotiation process of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) admitted as observers by the Conference of Parties (COP) have formed themselves into loose groups with diverse but broadly clustered interests or perspectives. In the early days of the climate change convention process the business and industry organizations and the environmental groups were particularly active and initiated systematic channels of communications with the secretariat and the Parties. This resulted in the acknowledgment of “constituencies”, with their own focal points. A flexible and manageable system evolved which enhanced the participation of large numbers of observer organizations. As of January 2014, there are more than 1,600 admitted NGOs. Without the cooperation of constituency focal points, it would not be possible for the secretariat to maintain effective interaction with interested stakeholders.

At the time of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee, there were two constituencies: the business and industry NGOs (BINGO) and the environmental NGOs (ENGO). Other constituencies have since been formed and recognized. Firstly, the local government and municipal authorities (LGMA) at COP 1 in 1995, then the indigenous peoples organizations (IPO) at COP 7 in 2001, the research and independent NGOs (RINGO) at COP 9 in 2003, the trade union NGOs (TUNGO) before COP 14/CMP 4 in 2008. Women and Gender and youth NGOs (YOUNGO) became full constituencies shortly before COP 17/CMP 7 in 2011. A request for recognizing Farmers constituency is currently under review while it operates as such on a provisional basis. The nine constituency focal points facilitate the exchange of information between the secretariat and the admitted observer NGOs.

Together the nine constituencies embrace approximately 90% of admitted kindred organizations, but some organizations such as faith groups and national parliamentarians remain outside these broad groupings, as the constituency system in the UNFCCC process mirrors the nine “Major Groups” identified as stakeholders in the Agenda 21. There are no constituencies among admitted intergovernmental organizations.

What are the benefits of being affiliated with a constituency?

Participation in a particular constituency is the choice of an individual or individual organization, and is neither official nor binding. It does not preclude direct communication with the secretariat by any individual observer organization, nor does it imply any sovereignty over the constituency on the part of the focal point organization. However, there are potential benefits in belonging to one of the constituencies - access to the Plenary floor in the form of an intervention, allocation of secondary badges when site access limit is planned by the secretariat, receipt of informal advance information on upcoming sessions from the secretariat, timely information through constituency daily meetings, occasional and very limited invitation to the Ministerial reception by host

Governments, access to bilateral meetings with officials of the Convention bodies, invitation by the secretariat to limited-access workshops between sessional periods, etc.

How do the constituencies interact with the secretariat?

The interaction between the secretariat and the constituencies is through the focal points who:

- provide a conduit for the exchange of official information between their constituents and the secretariat;
- assist the secretariat in ensuring an effective participation appropriate to an intergovernmental meeting;
- coordinate observer interaction at sessions including convening constituency meetings, organizing meetings with officials, providing names for the speakers list and representation at official functions;
- provide logistical support to their constituents during sessions;
- assist the secretariat in realizing representative observer participation at workshops and other limited-access meetings.

How can my organization become affiliated with a constituency?

When an organization applies for admission by the COP as a new observer, it fills in a contact details form where it expresses constituency affiliation. Once it is formally admitted by the COP, the secretariat will share the list of new observers with respective constituency focal points according to the information provided in the contact details form. Once your organization is admitted by the COP, please feel free to contact the constituency focal points whose contact details are available on our website.

Can one organization affiliate with multiple constituencies?

Constituency affiliation is of voluntary nature and there are no obstacles from the secretariat's side for any admitted NGOs to become affiliated with more than one constituency. Affiliation and collaboration within constituencies depends on mutual agreement only between the observer organization and constituencies in question and not with the secretariat. Subscription to mailing lists maintained by respective constituency focal points therefore only requires the consent from the focal points who maintain those mailing lists. The affiliation to one particular or multiple constituencies is a question of choice of each observer organization. The web list of admitted observer NGOs shows the constituency of primary affiliation only. In order for the secretariat to communicate more effectively, however, it will be helpful if your organizations inform the secretariat of multiple affiliations for information purposes only. Please fill in the contact details form under 'secondary constituency affiliation'.
