

# Quo Vadis COP?

## Future Arrangements for Intergovernmental Meetings under the UNFCCC – Settled and Fit for Purpose

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with a Foreword by  
Marianne Karlsen, Chair of the SBI

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## Foreword

Any healthy organization or process will at times consider the efficiency and relevance of how they organize their work. This is also the case for the intergovernmental process of the UNFCCC.

- How is the process set up to deliver on the many mandates and tasks given throughout its more than 25 years of operation?
- Does the beginning of the implementation era of the Paris Agreement call for process changes?

There are many questions that arise from these two fundamental ones and, accordingly, numerous opinions. There are formal as well as more informal arenas to engage in an exchange to foster efficiency and effectiveness of the UNFCCC process. It is vital that this exchange is based on broad engagement of all stakeholders, from Parties to civil society and research organizations. This report is a good example on how academia can play an active role by providing evidence-based framing, as well as thought provoking solutions. I hope that you as reader of this report will find it as illuminating as I did.

**Marianne Karlsen,**

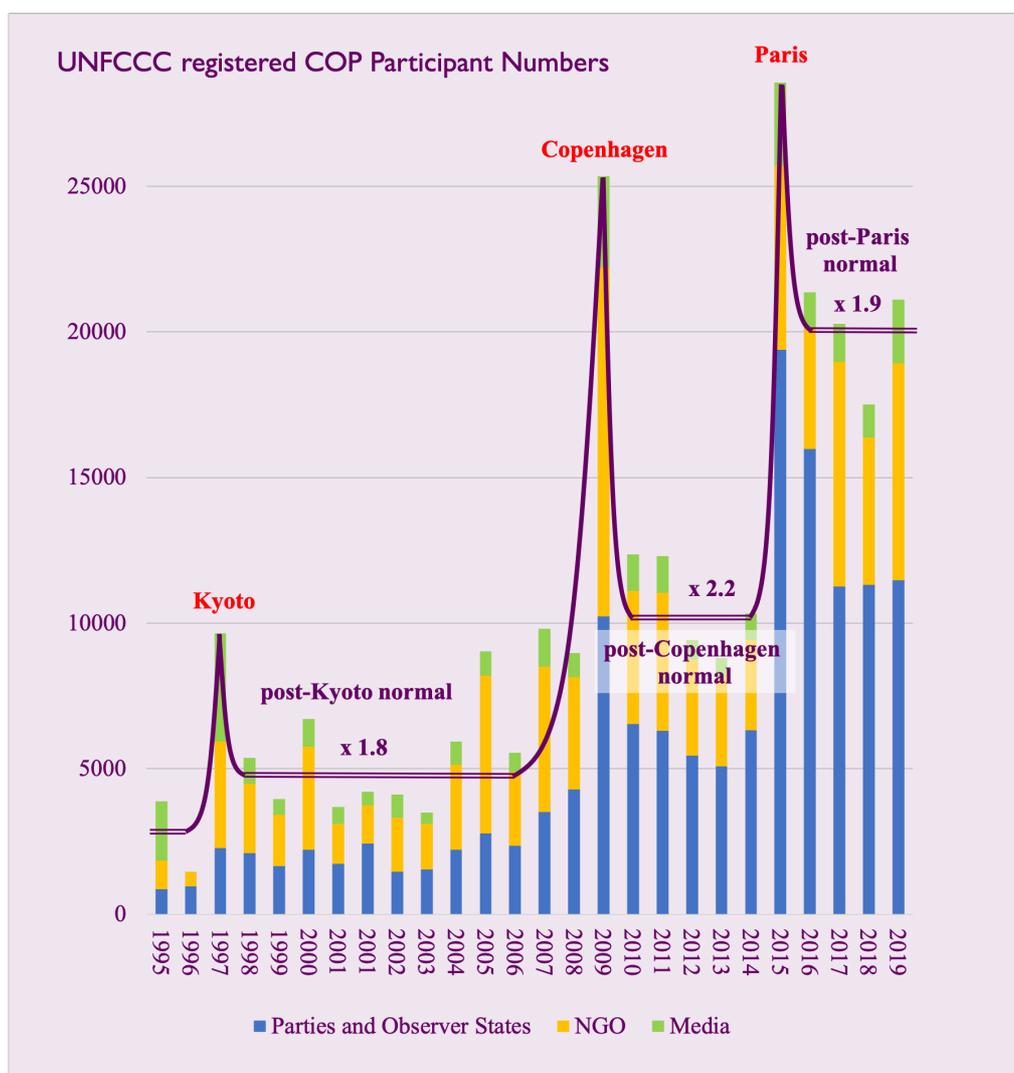
Chair of the UNFCCC Subsidiary Body for Implementation

November 2020

## Executive Summary

2020 marks the beginning of a new phase in the global negotiations on climate change: the implementation of the 2015 Paris Agreement. While the multilateral effort over the last three decades has focused on negotiating multilateral treaties and their rulebooks, the future will be about implementation. This shift of focus is likely to have major impacts on the role and functioning of the institutions responsible for the global negotiations, in particular for the Conference of the Parties (COP)<sup>1</sup> of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

In this report, we propose new arrangements that reflect this new role, particularly for the COP. We propose that COP sessions (COPs) should be slimmed-down in size considerably to deal with technical matters related to implementation. Political elements, meanwhile, can be dealt with in processes outside the COPs that have already been established to support implementation on the ground – such as the [Climate Action](#) agenda, the [Marrakech Partnership](#), the [Regional Climate Weeks](#), and the technical meetings and workshops that support countries in formulating and implementing policies and measures in support of climate ambition.



<sup>1</sup> We use ‘COP’ as shorthand designation for all the [supreme bodies](#) of the multilateral regime in this report.

## ‘Settled and Fit for Purpose’ (SFP) COPs

In this report, we consider the options that Parties to the UNFCCC have discussed over several years regarding the size, frequency, and location of COP sessions, in deliberations on ‘Arrangements for Intergovernmental Meetings’ under the Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI). We propose an additional option: to settle down the annual COPs at the [World Conference Centre](#) (WCC) in Bonn, the location of the UNFCCC Secretariat.

The WCC, however, can only accommodate ‘small COPs’ with up to 5,000 participants (which was the post-Kyoto ‘normal’). We therefore sought to explore whether it might be possible to return to small COPs from the new post-Paris ‘normal’ of over 20,000 COP participants.<sup>2</sup>

We find that the expected post-2020 workload could be managed in small COP sessions, and conclude that it should be possible for the post-2020 COPs to return to “post-Kyoto normality”. Achieving this, however, would involve relocating functions and events that are not essential to the technical negotiations on implementation, such as High-Level Segments and the non-Party stakeholder targeted ‘climate action’ activities taking place in the ‘Green Zone’, to a new UNFCCC global climate action flagship event.<sup>3</sup>

## High-level Global Climate Action Weeks

To do justice to the increasing importance of High-Level Segments and non-state actor targeted activities, we propose a new dedicated event: an annual high-level **Global Climate Action Week** (GCAW), organized by the UNFCCC Secretariat under the aegis of the respective COP Presidency, host country, and [High-Level Climate Champions](#).

These global high-level events are intended to draw publicity, including through joint ministerial statements and declarations, but it is important to stress that they are not meant to have any formal decision-making powers for the multilateral climate regime.

We propose that the GCAWs to be settled in Geneva, the location of one of the UN Headquarters. Geneva has the diplomatic and logistical infrastructure to host such large high-level events, and already hosts several international organisations relevant to climate action. Settling-down in a venue (with the prerequisite amenities) would, arguably, also lead to cost savings due to the familiarity with the logistical setting.<sup>4</sup>

## Global Stocktake COPs & Climate Ambition Summits

There may be occasions when a co-location of the COP and the High-Level Segments could be beneficial for the process, for example at the time of the Global Stocktakes (which are COP events). This, however, would only be logistically possible if the COP moves to the GCAW venue (Geneva).

There may also be occasions, for instance, when Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) are submitted or communicated,<sup>5</sup> where *highest*-level participation could be desirable as part of an ‘NDC-submission High-Level Segment’ during the GCAW. This could be done as **Climate Ambition Summits**, such as the [one co-convened on 12 December 2020](#) by the United Nations, the United Kingdom and France, in partnership with Chile and Italy.

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<sup>2</sup> Note that our ‘participant’ numbers are UNFCCC registration figures which do not necessarily reflect exactly the number of people physically in attendance.

<sup>3</sup> NB: The proposal is **not** to bar observers from the COPs, but merely to provide a separate event for those that are not actually interested in the technical negotiations (see Part V).

<sup>4</sup> On a practical note, Geneva, like Bonn, is in the Schengen area, so that both could be visited with the same visa.

<sup>5</sup> See V.1. High-level involvement, GST-COPs and ‘Global Climate Change.

## Overview

The multilateral climate change regime has a number of bodies which are collectively responsible for developing policies and guidance. This report looks at whether the institutional arrangements that arose to exercise these responsibilities in the pre-2020 period are best suited to the needs of the post-2020 phase of implementing the Paris Agreement.

**Part I** begins with a brief history of the institutional set-up of the multilateral climate change regime, followed by a summary and further analysis of the process options that have been deliberated for some time at the UNFCCC Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI) under the agenda item ‘Arrangements for Intergovernmental Meetings’ (AIM). It then turns to a more quantitative analysis of participant figures over time, and explores the various possible drivers for the significant observed increases in Party participant numbers over the years.

**Part II** considers the status quo, as represented by the intersessional meeting and COP in 2017 (SB46 and COP23). It analyses parties’ delegations, particularly their composition and the effects of high-level participation, on the size of delegations. It also finds evidence that the size of Party delegations is strongly driven by a small number of very large delegations and that the attendance of high-level delegates (such as ministers) has a considerable add-on effect on delegation size.

**Part III** identifies several functions that events at COPs currently fulfil, drawn from COP23 and SB47. The functions range from facilitating negotiations and supporting implementation,

### Box 1: The 2010 Oxford Climate Policy Report

In early 2010, after the 2009 Copenhagen Climate Conference which was seen by many as a (procedural) disaster, the UNFCCC Secretariat, on recommendation by the then UNFCCC Executive Secretary Yvo de Boer, commissioned Oxford Climate Policy (OCP) to write a report on *Improving the UNFCCC negotiating process and identifying options for approaching the High-Level Segment*.

In May 2010, the Executive Secretary issued a Note on [Arrangements for intergovernmental meetings](#) in which he announced the OCP Report:

*“For the long-term evolution of the process, possible issues for discussion relate to methods and practices of negotiation, including transparency, inclusiveness and ministerial engagement. ... Improvements in working methods, based on the principles of the Convention and its Kyoto Protocol, as well as models within the United Nations system, could also help to advance the negotiations. The secretariat has initiated a project to identify best practices with the United Nations system, with any methods identified to be presented to the SBI.”*

The OCP Report was submitted to the Secretariat, but the presentation of its conclusions to the SBI was blocked by Saudi Arabia. Nonetheless, the recommendations on *process ownership* and *political guidance* (subsequently published as a Climate Strategies [policy brief](#)) were taken on board by the Secretariat and, according to personal feedback, contributed to the success of the subsequent climate conference in Cancun, which was widely credited for restoring the legitimacy of the UNFCCC regime.

The OCP Report also included a section on ‘Permanence and Leadership – The longer-term needs’ which has not been implemented or published and which informed this Report.

to high-level engagement and widening participation in the regime. This Part further outlines which events fulfilled these various functions.

**Part IV** turns to the post-2020 ‘new normal’. It identifies the likely recurring agenda items, as well as the future timelines for mandated work programmes or reviews of aspects of the Paris Agreement rule book. Drawing from the functions identified in Part III and the analysis of participation numbers in Part II, this Part identifies the scale of future participation needed, and the functions to be fulfilled by various events in the future. It also discusses a number of benefits to be derived from combining high-level segments with non-state actor-centred events.

**Part V**, finally, contains a detailed introduction of the ‘Slim- and Settle-Down’ proposal.

## I. Background

This Part provides the background for the subsequent analyses of functions linked with COP sessions (Part III) and of the nature of the post-2020 negotiations (Part IV). It begins with a brief history of the institutional make-up of the multilateral climate change regime, and is followed by a summary and further analysis of the process options that have been deliberated for some time at the SBI under the AIM discussions. It finally turns to a more quantitative analysis of participant figures over time, and of suggested drivers for Party participant numbers.

### I. Institutional history

The international climate change regime has three multilateral treaties: The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC, adopted 1992, entry into force 1995), the Kyoto Protocol (adopted 1997, entry into force 2005), and the Paris Agreement (adopted 2015, entry into force 2016). The supreme governing bodies are:

- the Conference of the Parties (COP) for the Convention;
- the COP serving as Meeting of the Parties for the Kyoto Protocol (CMP); and
- the COP serving as Meeting of the Parties for the Paris Agreement (CMA).

We use the term ‘COP’ generically, to refer to (the meetings of) these supreme bodies.

The main role of the COP is to take decisions, including procedural, administrative, and substantive arrangements. It also reviews the implementation of the treaties and other legal instruments adopted by it.<sup>6</sup> For example, the COP annually reviews the emissions inventories and National Communications submitted by Parties.

Unless Parties decide otherwise, COP sessions (or short ‘COPs’) take place every year. The dates of these meetings are agreed well in advance. The default venue of the COP is at the headquarters of the UNFCCC Secretariat, in Bonn, Germany, unless Parties decide otherwise. With the exception of COP5 in 1999, COP6-bis in 2001, and COP23 in 2017, all the COPs have been held elsewhere, hosted by Parties, at considerable cost to them.<sup>7</sup> The COP Presidency normally rotates among the five UN-recognized regions: Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Central and Eastern Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Western Europe and others. As these conferences continue to expand in size, complexity, and costs, hosting is out of reach for many Parties – and those that do host them are often unable to recoup the costs involved.

In addition to the COP, the permanent Subsidiary Bodies (SBs) – for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA), and SBI – normally meet twice a year. During COP sessions, these two bodies meet in parallel with those sessions, with the costs covered by the

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<sup>6</sup> [‘What are governing, process management, subsidiary, constituted and concluded Bodies?’](#), UNFCCC.int.

<sup>7</sup> [‘Fiji and Bonn, an unusual partnership to host COP23 climate talks’](#), France24, 5 November 2017.

COP host country. There have also been several *ad hoc* bodies over the years to advance negotiations, all of which have now been closed.

All were said to have been justified in order to support the difficult negotiations that ultimately led up to the formulation and adoption of the Paris Agreement.

Over the past 24 years, there has been an exponential growth not only in the number of participants but also in the number of events either co-hosted with the COPs in the same venue, or held within other venues during the conference. A notable example is the Marrakech Partnership for Global Climate Action. Other initiatives have been established to strengthen collaboration among all stakeholders; this contributed to a ‘groundswell’ of action in support of the Paris Agreement. Other relevant events occur throughout the year, such as UN General Assembly sessions and the Climate Summits held by the UN Secretary General.<sup>8</sup>

## 2. Arrangements for Intergovernmental Meetings

Since 2012, the SBI has deliberated, under the AIM agenda item, the possible evolution of the format for the sessions of the multilateral climate change governing bodies. These deliberations have largely focused on three types of options for intergovernmental meetings:

- Scale (number of participants)
- Frequency
- Location

In this section we provide a summary of how these three types of options have been presented in documents from the UNFCCC Secretariat (‘AIM Documentation’). We focus on the most recent iterations of these discussions, as elaborated in:

- [AIM 2014] Note by the Secretariat ([FCCC/SBI/2014/11](#))
- [AIM 2015] Note by the Executive Secretary ([FCCC/SBI/2015/2](#))
- [AIM 2016] Note by the Executive Secretary ([FCCC/SBI/2016/2](#))
- [AIM 2019] Note by the Executive Secretary ([FCCC/SBI/2019/6](#))

### 2.1. Scale Options

An important distinction that emerged from the AIM deliberations is the one between “*larger, more politically oriented sessions and smaller, implementation-focused sessions*” [AIM 2015]. COP sessions have indeed grown from small (5,000) to large (10,000) to enormous events of 20,000 participants and more. Very large politically oriented sessions are now the norm.

One of the main tasks of this study is an analysis of the possible drivers of participation numbers, in particular of government (Party) delegates, with a view to understanding whether, in the post-2020 implementation-focused negotiations, a return to ‘small COPs’ (see I.2.3<sup>9</sup>) might be possible. Scale options are closely associated with the other options, particularly regarding the hosting locations. Alternating venues, between Bonn and a host

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<sup>8</sup> IISD (2013). [Climate Action Summit 2019](#). 23 September.

<sup>9</sup> ‘I.2.3’ refers to section 2.3 in Part I.

country (explored below), may necessitate smaller COPs, given the capacity of the World Conference Centre (WCC) in Bonn. Small COPs would also make COP Presidencies more accessible to small and poor Parties.

## 2.2. Frequency Options

Given that COP sessions are the locus of multilateral decision-making, a key consideration in the frequency debate must be: how long can we afford to wait for decisions to be taken? The SBI deliberations on the frequency of COPs have thus far centred around *annual* versus *biennial* COPs.

**Biennial Option:** A COP session every other year, with only Subsidiary Body meetings in between. The COP would be politically oriented, possibly without concurrent SB meetings. This would have considerable process implications, as elaborated in [AIM 2016, §§34 -35], with regards to process:

- Timing of the regional rotation of the COP Presidency
- Election of members of constituted bodies

and with regards to substance:

- Implications for agendas and current workplans
- Annual reporting of institutions and constituted bodies to the COP and the CMP

The substantive implications are significant. The key purpose of COPs is to take decisions. Moving from annual decision-making to a biennial rhythm would create two-year waiting periods that may not be helpful. The 2016 Note by the Executive Secretary highlights, in this context, that “*the annual reporting requirements of the operating entities of the Financial Mechanism and of the constituted bodies to the COP and the CMP would need to be adjusted to a biennial cycle*” [AIM 2016, §35].

**Multi-part COPs:** What has not been raised in the AIM discussions is the possibility of holding regular annual COPs in two parts. This would shorten decision waiting times to less than 12 months. The current intersessional SB sessions would be upgraded to COP status. This would not only reduce the decision waiting time to six months, but it would also double the time available for taking decisions by adding two weeks mid-year to the traditional two weeks at year end.

**Permanent COPs:** Permanent COP Sessions, as originally envisaged in the 2010 OCP Report (see **Box 1**), would eliminate waiting time and maximize decision-making time. But permanent negotiations would impose certain location and other logistical constraints and it is not self-evident that the nature of the post-2020 climate negotiations would really require this format (more on this in Part IV).

This is not to say that more decision-making time would not be useful, if only to avoid the recurring event of COPs running well past their scheduled close.

Longer COPs could help ‘de-glamorize’ the sessions, particularly in conjunction with the removal of high-level segments, but it is probably not feasible to extend the decision time beyond the current four weeks negotiating time (two weeks of SBs and two weeks of COPs).

### 2.3. Location Options

According to Rule 3 of the [UNFCCC draft rules of procedure](#), the default location of COP sessions is the seat of the Secretariat (Bonn), unless the COP decides otherwise. As it happens, the COP has only been in Bonn three times: COP5, COP6.bis, and COP23. With 4,200, 3,800, and 22,000 participants respectively, the first two were small and the last very large. COP23 was hosted in Bonn because Fiji, the COP23 Presidency, was unable to host at

COP	Named Outcome	Date	Participants
COP1 Berlin	Berlin Mandate	Mar 1995	3969
COP2 Geneva		Jul 1996	1501
COP3 Kyoto	Kyoto Protocol	Dec 1997	9850
COP4 Buenos Aires		Nov 1998	5641
COP5 Bonn		Oct 1999	4188
COP6 The Hague		Nov 2000	6994
COP6.bis Bonn/Netherlands		Jul 2001	3801
COP7 Marrakech	Marrakech Accords	Oct 2001	4460
COP8 New Delhi	Delhi Declaration	Oct 2002	4352
COP9 Milan/Hungary		Dec 2003	3733
COP10 Buenos Aires	Buenos Aires programme of work on adaptation and response measures	Dec 2004	6193
COP11 Montreal		Dec 2005	9451
COP12 Nairobi	Nairobi Work Programme (adaptation)	Nov 2006	5951
COP13 Bali	Bali Action Plan	Dec 2007	10628
COP14 Poznan	Poznan strategic programme on technology transfer	Dec 2008	9576
COP15 Copenhagen	Copenhagen Accord	Dec 2009	26661
COP16 Cancun	Cancun Agreement	Nov 2010	13199
COP17 Durban	Durban Mandate	Nov 2011	13344
COP18 Doha	Doha Climate Gateway	Nov 2012	10105
COP19 Warsaw	WIM, Warsaw Framework for REDD+	Nov 2013	9468
COP20 Lima	NAZCA portal	Dec 2014	11225
COP21 Paris	Paris Agreement	Nov 2015	30572
COP22 Marrakech	Marrakech Partnership	Nov 2016	22676
COP23 Bonn/Fiji	Suva Expert Dialogue on loss and damage	Nov 2017	22064
COP24 Katowice	Katowice Climate Package	Dec 2018	18646
COP25 Madrid/Chile	Chile/Madrid Time for Action	Dec 2019	22472

**Table 1. COP ‘Signature Outcomes’**

home. It was logistically very demanding and also costly (see Part II), with Germany covering significant host country costs. In practice, the COP has mostly been hosted in the country of the respective COP Presidency, although there have been other exceptions: COP9 (Hungary/Milan) and COP25 (Chile/Madrid).

As mentioned earlier, there has been an evolution in the size of COP sessions from relatively small to enormous, which went hand in hand with the addition of more functions (Part II discusses these in the context of COP23). Hosting a COP now involves a considerable cost to the host country, which may be one of the factors contributing to the tendency for COP Presidencies to try and get a newsworthy signature outcome named, in general, after the host city (see **Table 1**). These named outcomes vary in significance, perhaps underscoring the tendency of host countries to secure a legacy. Even in years when no large outcome is expected, host countries still seek to attach place names to smaller work programmes.

It stands to reason that holding the COP permanently at the seat of the Secretariat in Bonn would relieve the pressure on COP Presidencies to deliver such signature outcomes. Further COP sessions would have to be considerably reduced in size (see ‘Alternate Default Option’, I.2.3), not least by relocating all non-essential political functions (see Part III for an analysis) away from COP sessions. Given the implementation orientation of the post-2020 process, removing the perceived need for signature outcomes will be essential, given that the negotiations will be quite routine and will not lend themselves to turning out such signature outcomes.

As it happens, the one alternative that has been discussed in the AIM deliberations is to the default location, that is Bonn.<sup>10</sup> More precisely:

**Alternate Default Option.** *“It has been proposed that the COP decide to alternate its sessions between host countries and the seat of the secretariat (Bonn). ... Holding sessions in Bonn may thus increase the opportunity for more Parties to serve as the President, particularly for Parties that are not in a position to host a conference.”* [AIM 2015, §38]

Location options are, as indicated already, closely interlinked with scale options. In particular, not every location lends itself to hosting events of the size that COP sessions have currently reached. The WCC in Bonn, for example, was designed to accommodate around 4,000 participants [AIM 2015, §43]. While COP23 has shown that it is possible to hold an enormous COP in Bonn, there is very little appetite to do this again, not least in Germany, if it is expected to cover the cost shortfall as the host country.

*“It is conceivable that a small COP/CMP session could be held at World Conference Centre Bonn, but a larger COP/CMP session would have to take place at another facility in the host country.”* [AIM 2016]

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<sup>10</sup> Rule 3 of the [UNFCCC draft rules of procedure](#))

A major challenge with bringing the COP to Bonn are the cost implications [AIM 2015, §40], because the core budget of the Secretariat does not include funding for the organizational and logistics costs of COP sessions. These costs have, to date, been fully covered by the government of the host Party. The AIM documentation assumes the minimal scale of a future Bonn COP session to be two to four times that of an SB session which, it is assumed, would mean an organizational and logistics cost of €6-8 million.

	<i>States/organizations</i>	<i>Participants</i>
Parties	186	1 941
Observer States	1	1
<b>Total Parties + observer States</b>	<b>187</b>	<b>1 942</b>
United Nations Secretariat units and bodies	16	101
Specialized agencies and related organizations	14	68
Intergovernmental organizations	26	95
Non-governmental organizations	339	1 124
<b>Total observer organizations</b>	<b>395</b>	<b>1 388</b>
Media	39	59
<b>Total participation</b>		<b>3 389</b>

**Table 2. COP Participation statistics**

The problem with this extrapolation is that two to four times the scale of the current SB sessions (see **Table 2** for participation statistics of SB 46) would mean 6,000-12,000 participants, which is at the upper end of what we consider (see I.3.1) to be a ‘large’ COP session, in the Cancun to Lima bracket. It is difficult to see how the organizational and logistical cost of such events could fall within the suggested range without a fundamental re-think of functions that should be carried out at COP sessions. To stay within a scale for which SB costs can be used on an extrapolation basis, the sessions really need to be able to be held at the WCC – in other words, with fewer than 4,000 participants, or, 25 per cent more than current SB sessions. Part II will look into how such a scaling-down could be achieved.

### 3. Evolution of UNFCCC registered participant numbers 1995-2019

This section begins with a description of how participant numbers of COP and mid-year SB sessions have evolved over time, and then turns to discuss potential drivers of this evolution.

#### 3.1. COP and SB participant time series

The following participation analysis is based on UNFCCC registration numbers used as proxy attendance figures. As such, it also excludes registration figures regarding what has become known as the ‘Green Zone’, which is managed by the host governments. **Figure 1**

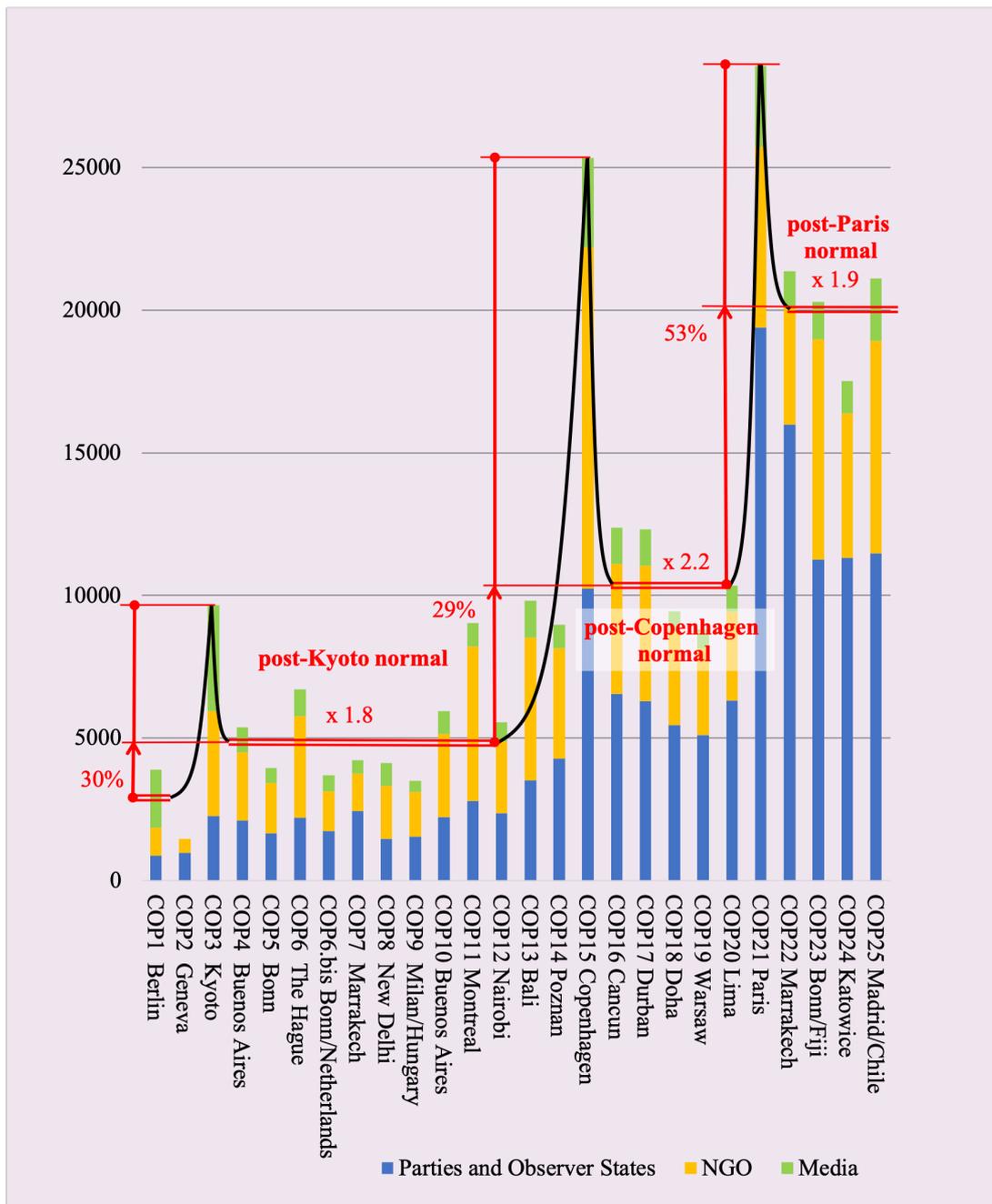
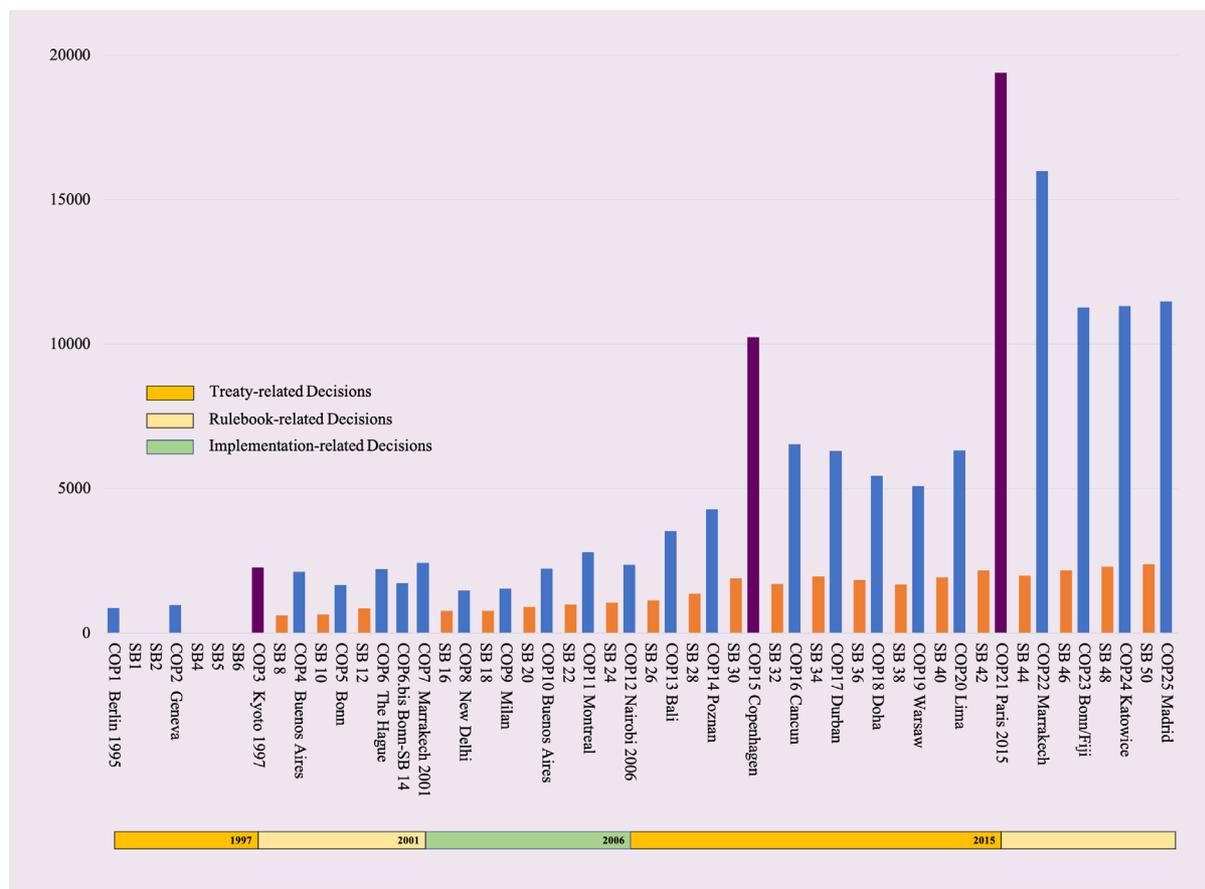


Figure 1. Number of registrations for COPs – with “process addictiveness” of treaty COPs

depicts the evolution of the number of COP registrations from COP1 (Berlin, March 1995) to COP25 (Madrid, November 2019).

**Figure 1** reveals an interesting pattern: after each ‘treaty COP’ (Kyoto, Copenhagen<sup>11</sup>, and Paris) – registration figures settled into a ‘new normal’, essentially doubling on each occasion. Before Kyoto, the average participant figure was 2,700. At COP3 (Kyoto) the figure was 9,600. Post-Kyoto, this settled down to a new average (from COP4 to COP12) of 4,800. At Copenhagen (COP15) the figure rose to 25,000, and settled down to a new normal of 10,600 (average of COP16 to COP20). After Copenhagen, the UNFCCC Secretariat began capping participant numbers of NGOs and media. Even so, 28,000 participants attended the Blue Zone at COP21 in Paris. After Paris, the figure settled to another ‘new normal’ of 20,000 (average of COP22 to COP25), again twice as many as at the previous level.

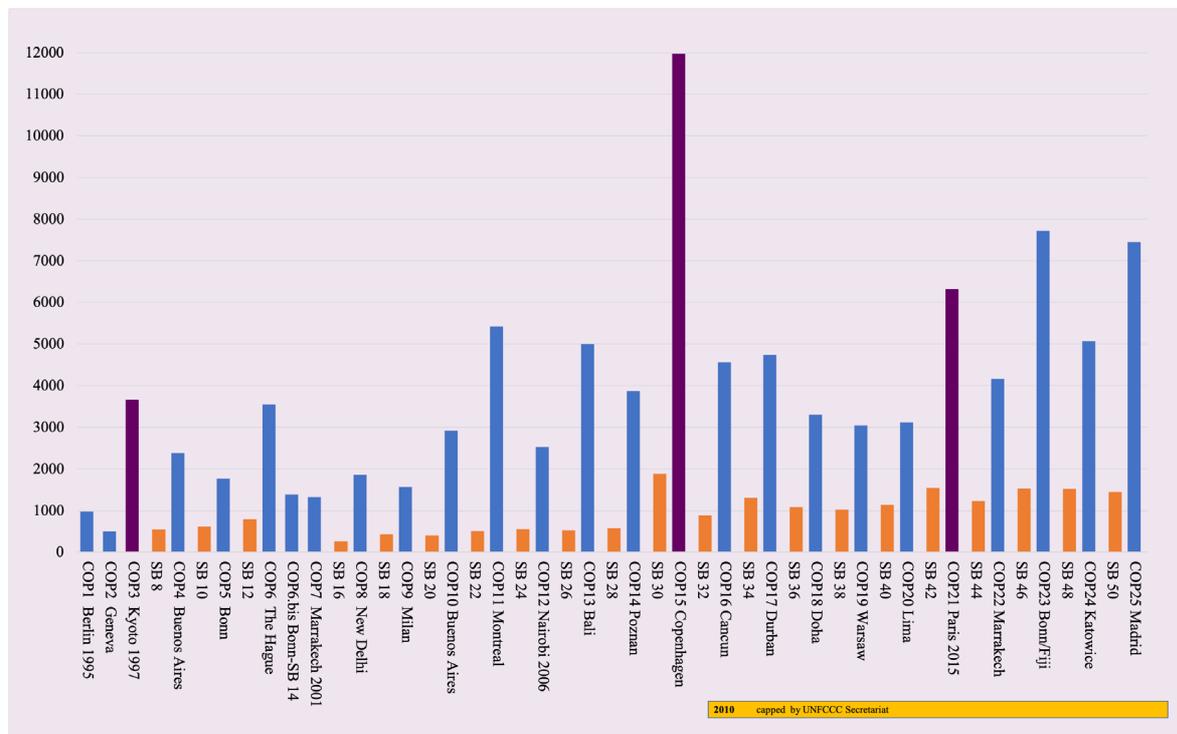
One, if not the main, task of the following analysis is to consider the drivers behind these figures. If one were slightly frivolous, one might blame the treaty COPs as being ‘process addictive’: after Kyoto, 30 per cent of the participants above the previous normal level caught the UNFCCC bug, the same for Copenhagen, and at Paris, it was more than half.



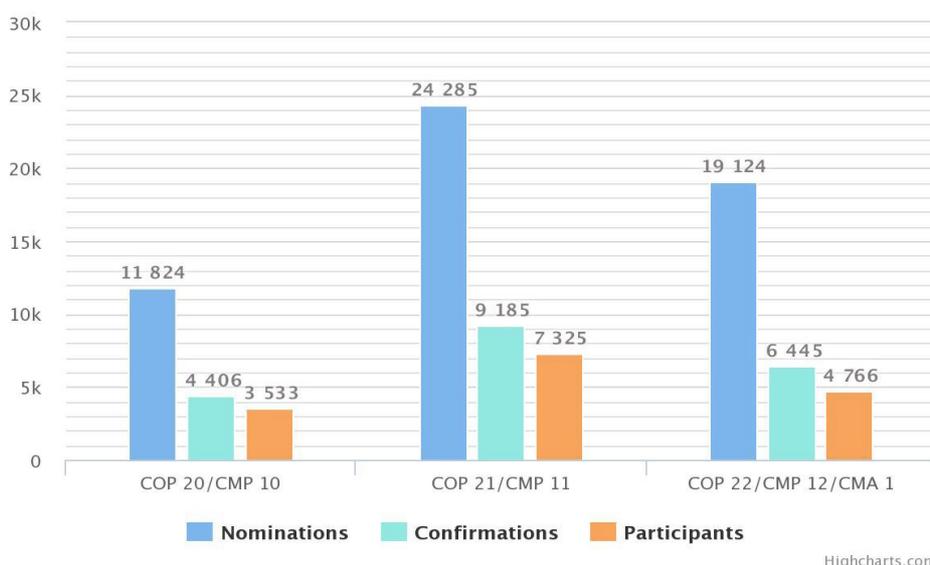
**Figure 2. Party Participation: COPs and SBs**

<sup>11</sup> COP15 did not actually produce a treaty, but was generally expected to do so.

**Figure 2** depicts the participation numbers of government delegates (pink badges) not just at COPs but also at the mid-year SB meetings in Bonn. The pattern mirrors that of the overall participation numbers (**Figure 1**), with the current normality of 11,400 five times the post-Kyoto average (of around 2,250) which, according to the AIM parlance, were ‘small’ COPs,<sup>12</sup> with (on average) overall participation numbers of well below the 5,000 that could, as such, be accommodated in Bonn.



**Figure 3. NGO Participation**



**Figure 4. IGO and NGO Registration COP20 to COP22** Source: [UNFCCC](http://unfccc.org)

<sup>12</sup> “The design of smaller COP/CMP sessions may include minimalistic elements that would reflect a different mode and scale of engagement and reduce participation (e.g. fewer than 5,000).” [AIM 2015]

The most important fact revealed by **Figure 2**, however, is that SB participation does not mirror the peaks and troughs of the treaty-COP pattern. SB participation simply grows (on average) by 95 participants annually.

Regarding participation by non-government organisation (NGO) observers (**Figure 3**), the pattern is not as pronounced as for government delegates. After the outlier of Copenhagen, the Secretariat introduced a rationing of available registration spaces. This new process means that participation does not reflect NGO demand for participation spaces, as illustrated in **Figure 4**, which in turn may also explain the relaxation of the rationing post-Paris.

After COP23, a new system allowing NGOs to ‘share’ badges among people from the same organisation on different days was created to facilitate NGO participation in smaller venues.

### 3.2. Drivers of Party registration numbers

The AIM documentation recognizes essentially four drivers for the number of participants as registered by the UNFCCC – that is the ‘Blue Zone’<sup>13</sup> badge holders:

- High-level participation (High-level Segment)
- Number of parallel sessions
- Increased workload
- Number of UNFCCC side events

*“Reducing the scale could be considered as a cost-saving measure consistent with the scenario of COP/CMP sessions held in Bonn focusing on implementation issues. The scale is affected by, inter alia, the number of bodies meeting, the agendas and decisions expected, whether a high-level segment and ministerial engagement is envisioned, and the number of side events.”* [AIM 2015]

It is quite likely that there are other drivers, and indeed some further potential drivers are analysed in Part II.

**Newsworthiness.** One potential explanation, in addition to those above, is that some COPs are more newsworthy, drawing more media, NGO, and government attention. **Figure 5** relates the number of Party and NGO participants (left scale) with the number of media participants (right scale). It clearly illustrates a distinction between ‘normal’ (500 to 1500) and ‘extraordinary’ newsworthiness (more than 1500 media participants). The COPs thus identified as being extraordinarily newsworthy are the start-up in Berlin, the treaty COPs in Kyoto, (Kyoto Protocol), Copenhagen (which was expected to lead to a treaty), and Paris (Paris Agreement), as well as the most recent COP in Madrid.

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<sup>13</sup> See II.1.2.

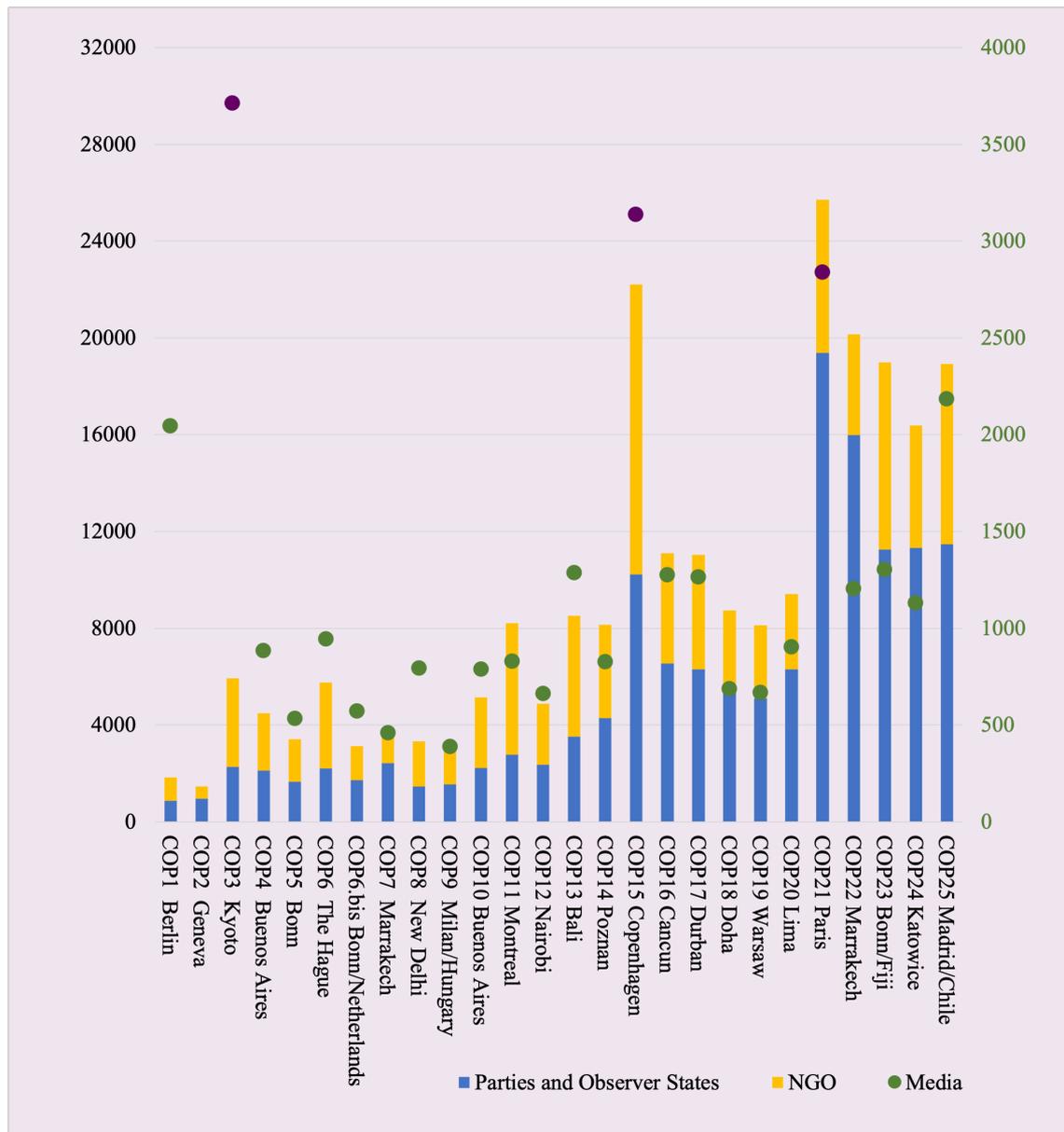


Figure 5. Newsworthiness



This result is not really surprising. Clearly if an event is perceived to be historic, then ‘anybody who is anybody’ will want to be (seen to be) there. What may be curious is the apparent newsworthiness of COP25 in Madrid. But this may be explained by a phenomenon outside the negotiation: Greta Thunberg, whose plenary intervention on behalf of ‘Climate Justice Now’ at COP24 in Katowice received global acclaim. As the global climate movement grows, media has turned its attention to the more easily relatable and more dramatic actions, rather than to the staid procedures of COP statements and negotiations.

**High-level participation.** Although the UNFCCC participation statistics do not include the number of high-level participants, it stands to reason that these are also correlated with the level of newsworthiness. At the same time, high-level participation may itself also be a driver in Party participation (‘my Head of Government or State and/or Minister will be there so I have to be there’).

Based on our analysis of COP23 and SB46 participant figures (see Part II), delegations which have at least one high-level official present tend to be significantly larger (well in excess of 50 per cent on average) than those that do not.

Indeed, scale taxonomy used in the AIM documentation, namely “*larger, more politically oriented sessions*” versus “*smaller, implementation-focused sessions*” clearly reflects the idea that the number of political functions associated with a COP session will be reflected in figures for participants. But it is important to distinguish different political functions.

The AIM reports address High-level Segments, which are attributed the following functions (‘opportunities’):

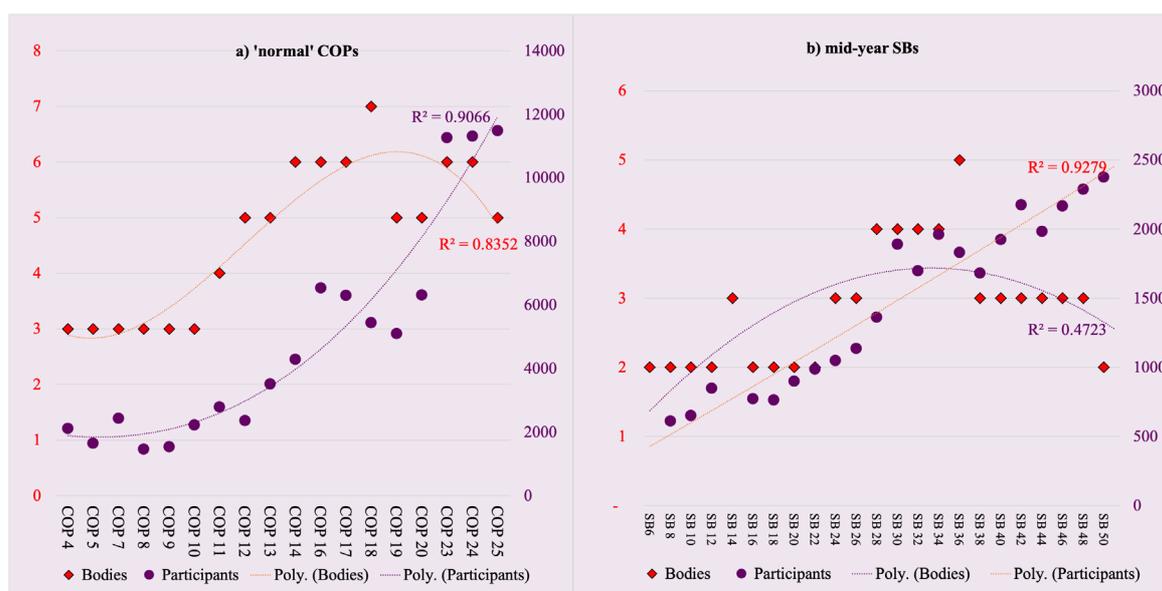
- (a) *For ministers and other heads of delegation, as well as representatives of intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations, to deliver concise national statements;*
- (b) *To advance agreement on major political issues;*
- (c) *For ministers and others to engage in bilateral discussions;*
- (d) *To demonstrate the prioritization of the UNFCCC process and ensure momentum;*
- (e) *For networking and information-sharing among ministers and with observers; and*
- (f) *To increase public attention to the key climate change issues, including through national and international media. [AIM 2014, §17]*

To answer the question whether small COPs should retain high-level segments one needs to consider whether the functions of these segments really do depend on being co-located with COP sessions, or whether they could be held, indeed better served, in a different context. This will be analysed in Part II, with reference to a case study (SB46 and COP23).

At first sight, however, there is only one of the functions listed in the AIM documentation that clearly requires co-location with the negotiations: to advance agreement on major political issues. Whether the post-2020 negotiations will throw up such major political issues is another question (see Part IV), but it can be done effectively and efficiently without a ‘High-level Segment’.<sup>14</sup>

That is not to say that the need for high-level political signals about ambition and action are not important. However, “Parties may wish to consider whether high-level involvement would be necessary should the scale of a COP/CMP session be reduced or focused on issues related to implementation.” [AIM 2015]. These functions have a role, but not necessarily in co-location with the negotiations. More on how this could happen can be found in Part V.

**Number of parallel sessions.** COPs are usually held in parallel with SBI and SBSTA sessions. In 2005, the Kyoto Protocol governing body had its first session (CMP1, Montreal), also in parallel with the COP; in 2016 the same happened with the governing body of the Paris Agreement (CMA1, Marrakech). In addition, there have been a number of Ad hoc Working Groups which also held their meetings in parallel, not only with the COPs, but also with the mid-year SB sessions in Bonn.



**Figure 6. Number of Party Participants & Number of Parallel Bodies**

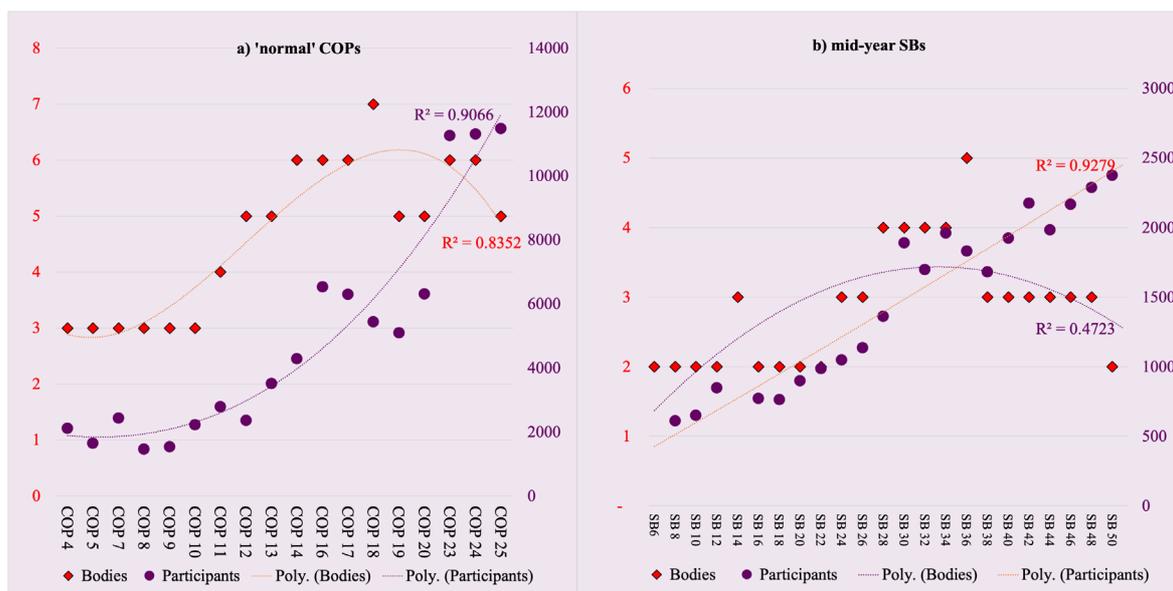
**Figure 6**<sup>15</sup> depicts the number of Party participants and parallel bodies for ‘normal’ COPs and mid-year SBs. Overall, we see an increase in participants as the number of parallel bodies rises. However, this relationship is not particularly strong, notably for the SBs, where a reduction in the number of parallel bodies is not associated with lower participant figures. As we show below, the number of agenda items is a better indicator of the expected delegate turnout.

<sup>14</sup> See ‘4. High-level Negotiations’ in Müller (2011)

<sup>15</sup> Left scale: number of parallel bodies; right scale: participant numbers.

**Increased workload.** Here, we plot the workload of the various bodies, including ad hoc bodies, against the number of participants. The AIM documentation suggests that the number of agenda item is a useful indicator of workload:

*“The agendas for each of the Convention and Kyoto Protocol bodies can often include many issues for consideration. The sessions of the COP and the CMP are regularly convened in parallel with the sessions of multiple other bodies, each with lengthy agendas, resulting in complex and intensive negotiating meeting schedules”.* [AIM 2014]



**Figure 7. Number of Party Participants and Number of Agenda Items**

It turns out that the total number of agenda items addressed in the different bodies during a COP or mid-year SB session is indeed significantly correlated with the number of Party participants attending these sessions. **Figure 7** depicts in the numbers for ‘normal’ COPs, that is to say the COPs that in I.3.1 were identified as ‘post-Kyoto normal’, ‘post-Copenhagen normal’, and ‘post-Paris normal’.

It shows that in the period of post-Kyoto normality the COPs were able to work on up to 120 agenda items with fewer than 3,000 Party participants (the averages for the period were 89 agenda items and 2,071 participants). In the post-Copenhagen period, COP18 managed to work on 179 agenda items with 5,445 participants (av.: 151; 5,936), and in post-Paris, COP23 dealt with 173 agenda items with 11,260 participants (av.: 165; 11,351).

The important lesson here is one of historically proven feasibility: It is possible for a COP to deal with around 100 agenda items at small COPs. This is corroborated by the figures for mid-year SBs, where at SB36, 1,832 participants worked through 97 agenda items.

A statistical analysis of these figures furthermore corroborates the significant correlation between agenda items and Party participant figures: a 1 per cent increase of agenda items increased the participant size of a non-treaty COP by about 1 per cent up until Paris (and by about 1.4 per cent if estimated for the whole period), and of SBs equally by about 1 per cent from SB 22 onward (or by 1.3 per cent if the estimates go back to SB6).

## II. The Status Quo

Having looked at the variations of COP and mid-year SB participation over time, we further examine variations between delegations as they currently appear. We will focus on 2017 for three reasons:

- The COP session in that year (COP23) is typical for the ‘post-Paris normal’ COPs we identified in Part I.
- Since both the COP and the mid-year SB (SB46) took place in Bonn, we can compare the two with greater ease by controlling for the effects of the host country location (including for costs and venue size).
- The German Government’s Environmental Report for COP23 [BMU 2017] contains a wealth of information regarding host country involvement, which is not always readily available for other COPs.

### I. What happened in 2017?

#### 1.1. SB46

The work and agendas of the SBs which took place in Bonn from 8 to 18 May 2017 largely focused on items important for COP23 later in the year.

The topics of SBI46 included: the nature of the reporting and review of the Annex I Parties; reporting from non-Annex I Parties; issues related to public registry or registries for Article 7.12 and/or Article 4.12 of the Paris Agreement; review of the modalities and procedures for the Clean Development Mechanism; matters related to the least developed countries (LDCs); national adaptation plans (NAPs); scope and modalities for periodic assessment of the Technology Mechanism; matters related to climate finance; capacity building; the impact on implementation of response measures; and the scope of the future periodic reviews of the long-term global goal under the Convention and the overall progress towards achieving it.

The topics taken up by SBSTA 46 included, among others: the Nairobi work programme; the technology framework under Article 10 of the Paris Agreement; issues relating to agriculture; matters relating to science and review; impact of the implementation of response measure;; methodological issues under the Convention and under the Kyoto Protocol; matters relating to Article 6 of the Paris Agreement; modalities for the accounting of financial resources; and cooperation with other international organisations.

Both SBs hosted a number of in-session mandated events that included: the facilitative sharing of views; gender; the Durban Forum on Capacity Building; the fifth Dialogue on Action for Climate Empowerment; the first ad hoc Technical Expert Group on the impact of the implementation of response measures; research dialogue; multi-stakeholder dialogue on local communities and indigenous people’s platform; and a session on capacity building. Technical expert meetings on mitigation and adaptation also convened.

In addition to the normal agenda items, SBI46 also organized an informal session for the purpose of identifying opportunities for strengthening and expanding the participation of non-Party stakeholders. Among the examined options were the following: giving observer

organisations the opportunity to make interventions and brief on their work; exploring ways to enhance the dialogue of NGOs with Parties (to make it more accessible within the established rules); facilitating the exchange of information on the implementation of the nationally determined contributions (NDCs) and NAPs, and enhancing existing practice in order to promote openness, transparency, and inclusiveness of the UNFCCC processes.

## 1.2. COP23 / SB47



Source: IISD 2017

In November 2017, COP23 was held in Bonn because Fiji, the COP23 Presidency, did not have the resources or facilities to hold such a large event. The government of Germany and the City of Bonn provided the infrastructure, and human and financial resources. The COP was organized as ‘one Conference, two zones’. Formal negotiations took place in what was referred to as the ‘Bula Zone’ – which subsequently became known as ‘Bue Zone’ – in the WCC, and some areas of the UN Campus. Climate action side events and exhibitions

took place in the ‘Bonn Zone’ (now ‘Green Zone’) – temporary structures located at some distance from the Bula Zone. There, Party delegations, observers of the UN and intergovernmental organisations, and other stakeholders could showcase their actions, share lessons and good practice, and consequently strengthen the climate change negotiations. The number of events that took place in the Bula Zone were evidence of the immense variety of climate action taking place around the world by a range of actors.

But there were drawbacks. NGOs submitted a letter to the Secretariat characterising COP23 as ‘two Conferences, two zones’. They noted that NGOs who were following the negotiations struggled to interact with Party delegates due to the distances involved and the separate badges issued for the two zones.<sup>16</sup> While many stakeholders were comfortable in the Bonn Zone, those attending with a Bonn Zone badge were barred from the Bula Zone, and felt excluded.

The costs were immense. 3000 people were involved in the preparation, planning, organisation, and logistical support of the COP itself.<sup>17</sup> The government of Germany (specifically the Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety) prepared a comprehensive report with a description of the conference venue and organisation, the overall environment and sustainability aspects of the conference, as well as the costs and savings. According to this report, the about €117 million was allocated for support and implementation of COP23. In addition, the Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development provided an extra €7 million to support Fiji’s COP23 Presidency and the construction of the

<sup>16</sup> Women and Gender Constituency (2018). Letter signed by all constituencies: ‘[Two Zones = Two Conferences](#)’. 28 January. #

<sup>17</sup> BMU 2017.

German Pavilion in the Conference grounds. There were several other costs, which included €418,000 for offsetting emissions and some €80,000 incurred for advisory services related to climate neutrality and sustainability strategy. Furthermore, several donations – mainly non-monetary and in the form of services – with an approximate total value of €830,000 also added to the total expenditure tally. These costs exemplify the immense financial implications that come with hosting a COP.<sup>18</sup>

And finally, as mentioned above, in addition to the COP sessions, the SB sessions also took place at the same time as usual. As future discussions will focus more squarely on implementation, the work of constituted bodies will become key. The role of the SBs, but primarily the COP and CMA, in reviewing and providing guidance to that work will be vital. It will, however, not represent an expansion of current efforts (see Part IV).

## 2. A statistical analysis of Party delegations

In this section, we examine the main differences in Party composition between COP23 and SB46 under the current, post-Paris normal. Based on the lists of named participants for all delegations, we classified every named individual according to hierarchical status and the type of agency the delegate represents. With this classification, we first provide an overview of the aggregate Party composition at both events. In a second step, we perform a more in-depth statistical analysis based on individual delegation data to gain insights into the main drivers of delegation sizes. Building on these insights, we are able to present a scenario that

	SB 46		COP 23	
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>1941</b>		<b>9202</b>	
<b>Overflow</b>	<b>120</b>	6%	<b>2485</b>	27%
<b>Total Listed</b>	<b>1821</b>		<b>6717</b>	
High-Level	21		298	
Senior official	493		1396	
Official	1049		3524	
Embassy	17		138	
other (NGO, academia etc.)	168		954	
n/a	73		407	
<b>Number from Environment Ministry/Agency</b>	<b>1109</b>	61%	<b>2868</b>	43%
Number of different Ministries/Agencies	718		2105	
Average representation per institution	2.5		3.2	
<b>Overlap</b>	<b>1137</b>		<b>1137</b>	
<b>Designation (Gender)</b>	<b>1820</b>		<b>6717</b>	
Female	767	42%	2378	35%
Male	1053	58%	4339	65%

**Table 3: COP 23 and SB 46 participant composition**

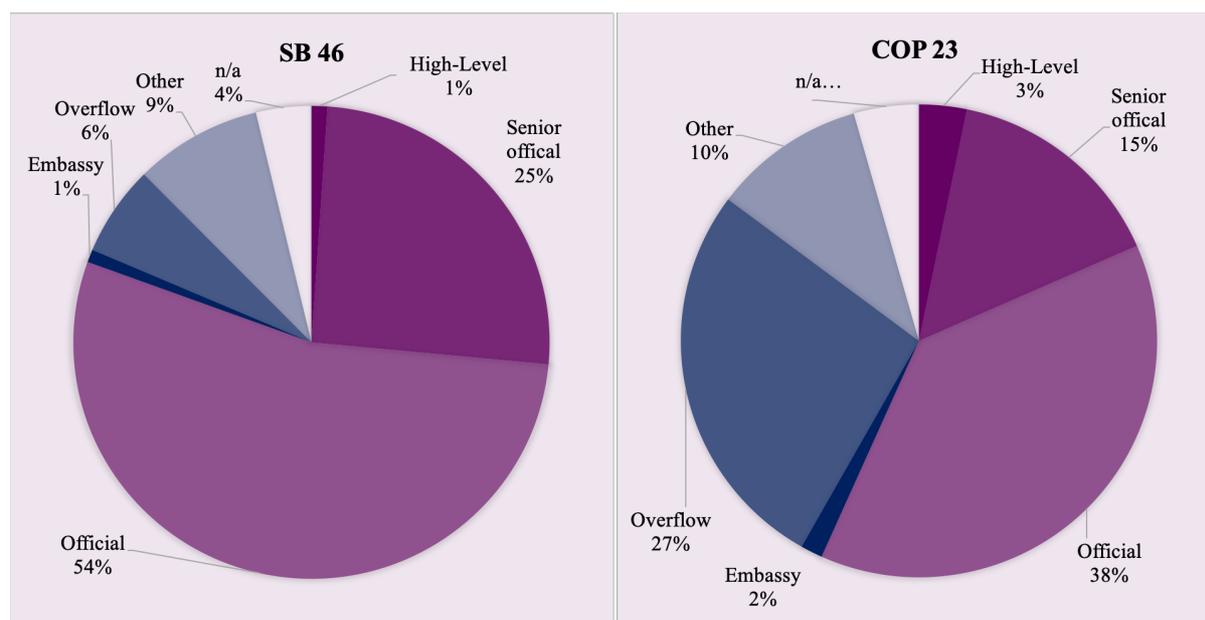
<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

would lead us back to post-Kyoto participant numbers which – at least in principle – should be able to deal with the expected workload of the regime after 2020.

## 2.1. Overview of COP23 and SB46

Both Party delegation size and composition vary considerably between COPs and SBs. **Table 3** contains an overview of the composition of Party participants based on our analysis of COP23 and SB46 participant information. A striking feature of COP23 is the large number of participants with a ‘delegation overflow’ badge. The ‘delegation overflow’ participants represented 27 per cent of Party participants at COP23, compared to only 6 per cent at SB46. These badges were first introduced at COP3 and allow Parties to nominate individuals without their name appearing on the official list of participants.

The pie charts in **Figure 8** further highlight the stark contrast between the share of ‘delegation overflow’ badges at COP23 and SB46. Without this sizeable group, the share of regular and senior officials would actually be very similar. In relative terms, there are more participants from the ‘high-level’ and ‘other’ (such as NGO and academia) categories at the COP, but overall, these differences are not very large compared to the extent of the ‘overflow’ category, for instance.



**Figure 8. Overall shares of different types of Party delegation members**

## 2.2. Analysis of the cross-sectional drivers of Party participation

Based on the list of named participants, we take a closer look at the differences in the composition of delegations at COP23 compared to SB46. We consider four main candidate drivers of participation numbers: (i) high-level participation, (ii) geographical proximity as well as the relative wealth of the country represented by a Party, (iii) the number of represented agencies/ministries in a delegation, and (iv) the degree of overlap between COP and SB delegations. For each of these factors, we examine whether they are able to explain a significant part of the observed Party sizes, and whether there are any marked differences between the patterns we see for COP23 and SB46.

Specifically, we run a series of linear regressions to statistically analyse the commonalities and differences between COP23 and SB46 delegation composition and size. All regressions control for being among LDCs, the log of GDP 2017 (or the most recent year available), being a European country (and hence closer to Bonn), as well as for membership in the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS). Our main observations are as follows:<sup>19</sup>

**High-level participation is associated with much larger delegations.** We find that the presence of one or more high-level participants increases delegation size by 57 per cent relative to the average at COP23. There was at least one high-level participant in 136 delegations, while 58 had none. For SB46, we find high-level presence raised delegation size by about 83 per cent relative to the average delegation's size, but only 15 delegations (out of 194) had at least one high-level participant listed.<sup>20</sup> See also I.3.2.b for a discussion on drivers of high-level participation

**Geographical and income-related variables are relatively weak predictors of delegation sizes.** Countries with larger economies tend to have larger delegations, but (log) GDP alone is only moderately correlated with delegation size for COP23 (correlation coefficient = 0.34). In other words, country wealth is not a major determinant of participation figures. Adding population, LDC status, AOSIS membership, and information on whether a country is located in Europe has virtually no effect on our ability to fit our regression to the observed data. For SB46, we find that (log) GDP is a slightly stronger predictor of delegation size (correlation coefficient = 0.57).

**The single best predictor of delegation size is the number of ministries/agencies represented in a delegation.** The number of represented ministries/agencies is highly correlated with the total number of delegates at both COP23 (correlation coefficient = 0.91) and SB46 (correlation coefficient = 0.85). Having one more ministry/agency present is associated with an increase in delegation size of about 9 per cent at COP 23, and 25 per cent at SB46, relative to the average delegation size. Put differently, a typical ministry/agency will send roughly three delegates to these meetings, and some countries send delegates from a very wide variety of ministries/agencies.

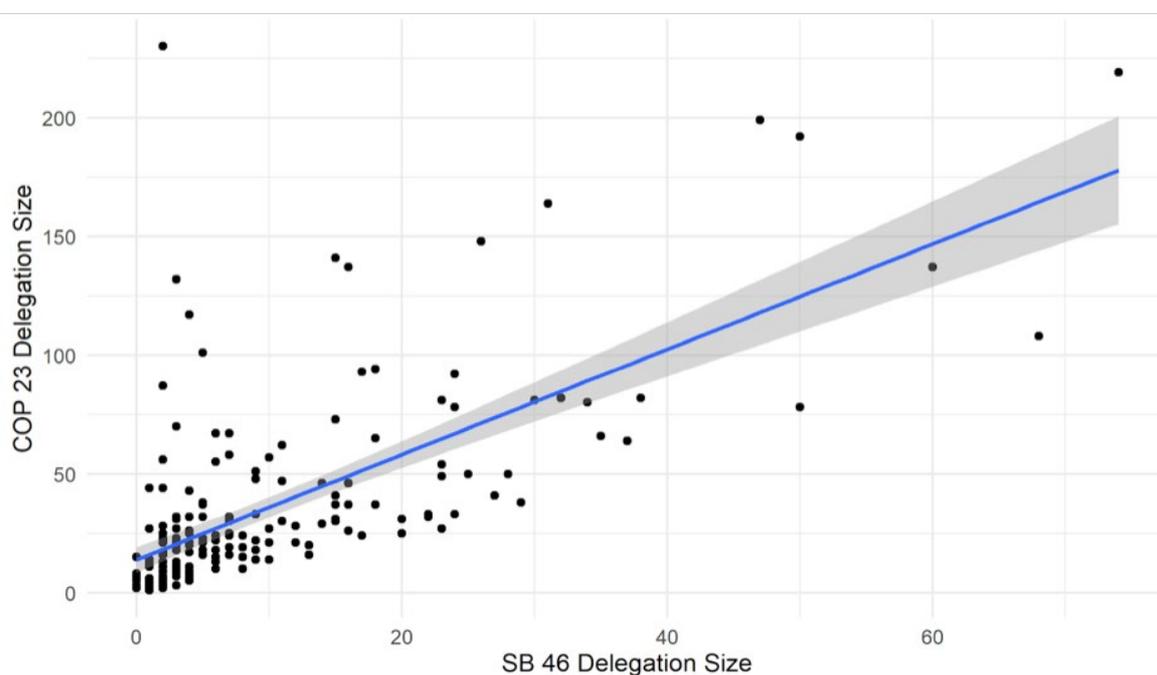
**Nearly two-thirds (63 per cent) of SB46 delegates also attended COP23. However, owing to the larger delegation sizes for the COP, on many delegations these delegates represented only a small share.** On average, we find that having an additional delegate who attended SB46 increases COP23 delegation size by slightly more than two delegates. However, this figure masks a large degree of heterogeneity across delegations. For example, 59 of the 194 delegations at COP23 had either 10 or more delegates per individual who attended SB46 as well (36 delegations), or no overlap at all (23 delegations). This heterogeneity is also clearly visible when we plot (**Figure 9**) the country-level relationship

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<sup>19</sup> GDP (in current USD) and population data were sourced from [total population, World Bank Open Data](#), with a few additions from the [CIA world factbook](#) in cases where the World Bank did not provide data. All effects mentioned below are statistically significant at the 5%-level at the very least.

<sup>20</sup> High-level participants are defined as participants with 'H.E.' (His/Her Excellency) as a listed title, in the official participant list. This definition includes ministers (and similar roles such as state secretaries), and Heads of State.

between COP23 and SB46 delegation size. **Figure 9** suggests that a large part of the increase in delegation size may be due to a relatively moderate number of Parties (roughly two dozen)



**Figure 9. COP 23 and SB 46 delegation size by country**

whose COP delegate counts don't reflect the corresponding representation at SBs.

### **2.3. How to reduce Party participant figures to post-Kyoto levels**

**Based on the estimates above, we can identify a few simple factors that would reduce Party participant figures to post-Kyoto normal levels.** As we've highlighted in I.3.2, there are no reasons to suspect that the workload has grown to exceed the capacity of these historical delegation sizes. Importantly, the scenario below focuses on the number of listed participants. Delegation overflow (see II.2.1) is an issue for which we lack proper data to analyse. Our assumption in this regard is that the absence of these delegates on any named participant list likely also precludes their presence as a vital prerequisite for the success of a conference.

Our model on how to achieve post-Kyoto normal levels of Party participation rests on three simple factors:

**First, listed participant figures are to a considerable extent elevated by relatively few delegations.** We allow for the possibility that COPs do entail some overhead compared to SBs; say, a delegation of 15 people for an SB session would have to grow to 30 people for the COP, which we judge to be a very generous allowance. This factor of 2 is in line with the average ratio of SB 46 to COP23 delegation size (see **Figure 9**). Suppose further that countries with no or very small delegations may still want to send a medium-sized delegation to the COP, which may translate into up to 20 people participating in the COP. At COP 23, 111 delegations were within these delegation size criteria and 35 additional delegations were within 10 delegates of this scenario. Only 23 delegations were more than 30 delegates above

the scenario thresholds. If all delegations had chosen to stay within these generous parameters, COP 23 participant numbers would have been reduced by approximately 2,400 delegates.

**Second, a removal of the high-level segment is expected to greatly reduce the presence of high-level officials and associated supporting staff.** Here, we assume that the number of delegations with high-level participants shrinks from 136 (the total at COP23) to 14 (the number at SB46), and an average of two high-level participants in these delegations. Based on our estimates above, we further assume that the drop of high-level participants will shrink a delegation by eight people per high-level participant (allowing for some overlap with the reduction in delegates based on the previous paragraph). This would further reduce our expected number of participants by nearly 1,000 delegates.

**Third, the expected decrease in agenda items to slightly above 100 (see Part IV) should have an equally pronounced effect on delegation size.** Compared to COP23, the expected number of agenda items going forward is lower by approximately one third. Based on our elasticity of participant figures of about 1 with respect to the number of agenda items (which we found for both SB and earlier COP sessions – see I.3.2), we assume that the corresponding reduction in the number of delegates will also amount to roughly one third. This is further consistent with the estimated impact of reducing the number of agencies by about a third, from an average of 11 different represented agencies per delegation as observed in the COP23 participant list down to seven.

**These three scenario components alone would be sufficient to reduce the expected number of listed participants to somewhere between 2,000 and 2,500 delegates going forward** (see Table 4 for our unrounded numerical estimates). Based on our analysis of past conferences, the work can be done, and indeed has been done, by a total participant count of this size.

Factor	Impact	Resulting participant numbers
Party participants (COP23 benchmark <sup>*</sup> )		6,717
1) Delegations orient size of COP detachment on SB participation	-2,398	4,319
2) Removing high-level segment	-976	3,343
3) Reduction in the number of agenda items	-1114	2,229

<sup>\*</sup> Excluding 'Party overflow' badge holders.

**Table 4: Implication of measures to reduce Party participation figures**

## III. The Gordian Knot of the Multilateral Climate Regime

In Part I, we provided a brief description of the role of the main bodies of the climate change regime. And in Part II, a summary of the main activities of COP23 and SBs 46 and 47 served as a case study to further explore what drives participation. In this Part, the focus is on the functions of these bodies and events. Again, using COP23 and SBs 46 and 47 as examples, this Part provides a list of the many activities that took place, categorized by specific functions. The purpose of this breakdown is to provide a more comprehensive overview of what COPs normally do and what they aim to achieve. This analysis is carried out against the backdrop of a changing reality in the post-Paris Agreement era, marked by an absence of negotiations for a new agreement. The functions identified in this Part help to assess what activities will need to take place in parallel with the COPs, and what events could be co-located (if they are needed at all).

We identified the functions in this Part inductively, by cataloguing the various events that occurred at COP23 before turning to the functions that these events served to aid climate governance. This COP is a good basis for this exercise for several reasons. It took place after the adoption of the Paris Agreement, representing one of the first meetings of the ‘post-Paris’ normal identified in Part I. The purpose of this Part is to provide a good overview of these activities and the functions they fulfil.

II.1 outlines the functions, while III.2 gives a sample of events or activities undertaken by various bodies to illustrate how these functions were fulfilled.

## I. Taxonomy of functions in the pre-2020 regime

**Table 5** lists the taxonomy of functions, and shows which UNFCCC bodies and events held at the COP serve the various functions. We derived these functions from considering the original mandates of the bodies, and also subsequent mandates and decisions over time.

Functions	Bodies / Events					
	<i>COP, CMP &amp; CMA</i>	<i>SBs</i>	<i>High-Level Segment</i>	<i>Constituted &amp; other bodies</i>	<i>Side &amp; mandated events</i>	<i>Climate Action &amp; parallel events</i>
<b>Decision-making</b>	X					
<b>Rule development</b>	X	X	X			
<b>Implementation oversight and support</b>	X	X		X		
<b>High-level engagement</b>			X			
<b>General awareness raising</b>				X		X
<b>Facilitating ambition</b>	X		X	X	X	X
<b>Enhancing the science-policy interface</b>		X				X
<b>Widening participation by non-Party stakeholders</b>				X		X

**Table 5: Functions of various UNFCCC bodies and COP events**

We see the various functions as follows:

- *Decision making*: The COP, CMA, and CMP are the supreme decision-making bodies. Such decisions can be the adoption of treaties, but can also be decisions related to the ongoing work of the regime.
- *Rule development*: Supporting Parties' efforts to establish, refine, and adopt new rules in the regime.
- *Implementation oversight and support*: Hearing updates, reviewing and providing guidance to the constituted bodies and operating entities of the financial mechanism, undertaking work programmes, and reviewing Parties' efforts (as mandated). It also includes providing guidance to constituted bodies and the operating entities of the financial mechanism, and support to Parties' implementation efforts – for example, through technical work on the greenhouse gas data interface.
- *High-level engagement*: Involves the networking, information sharing, and signalling of political commitments that ministers and Heads of State or Government are best suited to undertake.
- *General awareness raising*: Efforts to engage a wider, often public, audience and build an understanding of climate change and of what constitutes climate action.
- *Facilitating ambition*: Efforts to support Parties to move beyond minimal implementation. Parties' decisions related to: the Global Stocktake, review of the long-term global goal, and events such as Thematic Expert Meetings, all relate to ambition.

- *Enhancing the science-policy interface*: Involves strengthening the flow of timely information and data that is tailored to the needs of the UNFCCC and Parties, and also informs Parties of emerging issues and options.
- *Widening participation by non-Party stakeholders*: Efforts to bring cities, communities, businesses, investors, and others to undertake mitigation and adaptation efforts.

The next section illustrates how the various bodies and events fulfilled these functions, in order to give an assessment of which of these activities need to be co-located with the COP. Prior to the Paris Agreement, it was often perceived that it was an advantage to hold many activities during the COPs, to show a high degree of interest, urgency, and commitment by many stakeholders, and, ultimately, to put pressure on negotiators to arrive at a deal. With the adoption of the Paris Agreement, creating that pressure for a deal is no longer necessary. There are many high visibility events that, as we show below, have carved a role in the regime. These events could potentially better serve those functions if held independently from the COP, to provide dedicated attention to non-state actors' collective efforts (see Part V).

## 2. The functions of bodies and events convening at COP23

The decision-making bodies for the UNFCCC, Kyoto Protocol, and Paris Agreement that comprise the formal rules of the climate change regime unsurprisingly fulfil several functions of the regime.

**Decision making:** The COP and CMP took several decisions during the meeting. The CMA met and was suspended while waiting for the rulebook decisions to be finalized.

**Rule development:** Most negotiations were devoted to advancing work on the various guidance and modalities to operationalize the Paris Agreement rulebook. The Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples' Platform was finalized, the first part of the rulebook to be completed.

Parties also agreed to the Koronivia Joint Work on Agriculture, a work programme with events and submissions on various issues related to climate change and agriculture. A Gender Action Plan was agreed by Parties for the first time, to help increase the participation of women in all UNFCCC processes and to support the development and effective implementation of gender-responsive climate policy at all levels of government.

**Implementation oversight and support:** In addition to electing members of several bodies, the decision-making bodies reviewed and adopted the reports of several constituted bodies. The COP also provided guidance to the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and the Green Climate Fund (GCF). The COP also reviewed the reporting from Annex I Parties and from non-Annex I Parties. Parties also reviewed the effective implementation of the Centre for Climate Technology and Network (CTCN).

Parties created the Suva Expert Dialogue and the Fiji Clearing House for Risk Transfer to provide online resources to connect vulnerable countries with the best available information.

**Facilitating ambition:** Parties adopted a decision on the format of the 2018 facilitative dialogue, which became known as the Talanoa Dialogue. This dialogue was intended to help

inform any updates or new NDCs submitted in 2020. To build trust and signal commitment to the Adaptation Fund, some donor countries pledged additional contributions to the Fund. While not a result of an agenda item per se, the negotiations regarding the Adaptation Fund and how it will serve the Paris Agreement likely helped spur these contributions.

## 2.2. Subsidiary bodies

**Rule development:** The SBs and the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Advancement of the Paris Agreement (APA) worked to advance negotiations related to the Paris Agreement rule book. The SBs also advanced negotiations on gender and agriculture, among other issues not related to operationalising the Paris Agreement.

**Implementation oversight and support:** This is a fundamental aspect of the SBI's mandate. Parties reviewed the reports and drafted guidance to several constituted bodies and the technology mechanism. The SBI, during the intersessional meeting, reviewed and agreed to the biennial budget, and other administrative and organisational matters.

The SBs convened various mandated events to help support Parties' efforts or implement mandates. These included Technical Expert Meetings on mitigation and adaptation, and the facilitative sharing of views for developing countries to present their efforts and to implement the multilateral reviews integral to the Cancun transparency framework.

**Enhancing the science-policy interface:** This function is central to the work of the SBSTA. The SBSTA Chair routinely holds informal meetings with the scientific community and provides an opportunity for Parties to be updated on the activities of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

## 2.3. High-level segment

High-level segments have been important in the past to provide a sense of support, urgency, and commitment for a new climate deal. With the Paris Agreement in place, the purpose of these needs to be assessed in view of the new reality. One of the needs in the future is to ensure that countries deliver and raise ambition with each NDC. It is doubtful that these activities need to take place in parallel to the COP or be co-located. These could become special events in another location and be held as needed, with the periodicity that the Parties deem necessary.

As identified by the Executive Secretary in 2014, the High-level Segments are an opportunity for:

- Ministers and other heads of delegations, as well as representatives of intergovernmental organisations and NGOs, to deliver concise statements.
- Advancing agreement on major political issues.
- Ministers and others to engage in bilateral discussions.
- Demonstrating the prioritisation of the UNFCCC process and ensure momentum.
- Networking and information sharing among ministers and with observers.
- Increasing political attention to the key issues, including through national and international media.

**Rule development:** Ministers were engaged in helping to chair and resolve negotiations during the second week of the conference.

**High-level engagement:** The speakers who received the most attention were the President of the COP, who called for higher ambition; the UN Secretary General, who suggested that projects that ‘were not green’ should not be given a green light and who called on donor countries to bring the GCF Fund to life; and the German President, who emphasized that multilateralism is indispensable for a peaceful and sustainable world. Generally, the in-person audience for the two-day High-Level Segment is small, but the event is webcast.

**Facilitating ambition:** Several of the pledges to the Adaptation Fund (noted above) were made during the high-level segment.

## 2.4. Constituted and other bodies

**Implementation oversight and support:** There are several constituted bodies, funds, and financial entities. Constituted bodies meet during the year in various locations to implement their work programmes and prepare a report and recommendations for the COP, CMP, and/or CMA. The operating entities of the financial mechanism, the GCF, and the GEF meet to take funding decisions throughout the year in line with the guidance provided, but according to their own rules of procedure.

Representatives of the constituted bodies provide oral reports to the COP, CMP, and/or CMA and represent the bodies at various events at the COP.

## 2.5. Side events

Side events and exhibitions took place in the Bonn Zone, making it a major hub for showcasing climate action, knowledge-sharing, capacity-building, and networking. More than 800 organisations applied for side events, but not all could be accommodated. COP23 introduced the idea of a ‘mini side event’, which was shorter in duration and held on an open stage, rather than in a room, in the Bonn Zone.

The new categories established for side events at COP23 could help to identify those that are absolutely essential for the COP negotiations. As introduced after the adoption of the Paris Agreement, the official side events are now organized under the common theme ‘Accelerating implementation of the Paris Agreement’ and will be under three categories: enhancing ambition; promoting implementation; and providing support to developing countries. In total, there were 418 side events. These included:

- A series of events organized under the Marrakech Partnership for Global Climate Action (discussed separately below).
- Special events and high-level events organized by the COP Presidency and the UNFCCC Secretariat.
- A large number of side events on climate-related issues offered by governments, NGOs, the UNFCCC secretariat, and other UN organisations.

**Implementation oversight and support:** Some events were held by various UN bodies to provide updates on their climate-related work. A notable example was the ‘IPCC Task Force on National Greenhouse Gas Inventories’ side event, which discussed progress on updating the guidelines used by governments to measure their greenhouse gases. The IPCC announced that it was updating its existing guidelines in order to continue to provide a sound scientific basis for future international climate action under the Paris Agreement.

**Facilitating ambition:** Several of the events held included ideas related to the GST and how to facilitate Parties to undertake more ambitious outcomes. Such events in the Bonn Zone could have provided a ‘one stop’ opportunity for Parties to learn of the synergies among the work of various UN (and other) bodies. However, given the ‘one Conference, two zones’ concept, Parties faced difficulties transiting to the Bonn Zone. The events related to this function were also interspersed throughout the two-week schedule, diluting the overall effect of supporting Parties’ action and learning opportunities.

## 2.6 The Marrakech Partnership for Global Climate Action and Parallel Events

The **Marrakech Partnership** aims to strengthen collaboration between Parties and non-Party stakeholders to allow greater mitigation and adaptation actions to be implemented immediately. The objectives of the Partnership are:

1. Maximising the convening power of the UNFCCC process to connect stakeholders to enhance the effectiveness and impact of their efforts.
2. Enhancing the connections between various aspects of the UNFCCC process related to enabling action, including: the Technical Examination Processes on Mitigation and Adaptation, the relevant aspects of the work programmes of the constituted bodies, the mandated High-Level Events on Climate Action, and various related engagement opportunities connected to the broader UNFCCC process.
3. Strengthening the connectivity with local, national, regional, and international actions, with potential to promote innovative technologies and solutions that are scalable and replicable.

**Widening participation by non-Party stakeholders:** At COP23, the Secretariat organized actions to further the scope of the Partnership across the following thematic areas: land use (agriculture, forestry, and other land use); water; oceans and coastal zones; energy; industry; human settlements; health; and transport, and through a local and regional leaders’ summit. In addition, there were also High-Level Days on the following themes: finance; resilience; innovation; Climate Action and SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities); Climate Action and SDG 2 (zero hunger); and SDG 5 (gender).

There were over 100 events held in the Bonn Zone related to the Partnership that were openly accessible to Parties (when they were available) and non-Party stakeholders. To design their plan of organized actions, the Champions carried out intensive consultations with Parties, Constituted Bodies, and observers. The Marrakech Partnership for Global Climate Action proved to be a valuable tool for both Parties and non-Party stakeholders for building

collaboration, enhancing constructive dialogue, and collectively driving ambitious climate action.

These activities do not need to be held in parallel with the COP. Their effect could be enhanced by holding them in another location at other times prior to the COP, to give support and ambition to the climate regime.

## IV. The nature of post-2020 negotiations

The previous part identified the functions fulfilled by the various events held at COPs. This part considers these functions and identifies which future events and agenda items will continue to fulfil these purposes in the regime. Going forward, several functions need to be recast in terms of implementation, such as negotiations, review and oversight, and, to some extent, facilitating ambition. Future COPs will need to address these issues, as they pertain to fine tuning and furthering the effectiveness of the Paris Agreement.

Other functions are no longer linked to negotiations in the post-2020 period. High-level engagement will be useful for signalling political commitment and networking, but will hold less relevance for involving ministers in negotiations. Similarly, awareness raising and widening participation were once important to gather interest in building momentum and pressure to help negotiations to realize the Paris Agreement. These functions are important, but no longer have the same link to the negotiations. They could easily be re-located to a new event. Since high-level engagement fulfils similar functions, the two could be usefully combined.

This Part considers the quantity and, where foreseeable, the content of future negotiations. The first section considers the ‘new normal’ of negotiations, by plotting the likely recurring agenda items and the future work that is already mandated. The paper then turns to the relevant functions that the future process will serve, drawing on the functions identified in Part III.

### I. The ‘New Normal’

The post-2020 period will be markedly different from the past, in terms of the functions to be fulfilled by the UNFCCC. Negotiations to create new rules or institutions will be less common. Most ongoing discussions will relate to implementation. This section overviews the future of the regime in terms of deadlines and events, to show what functions the multilateral process will need to attend to in the post-2020 period.

**Table 6** provides a rough indication of the base stock of substantive agenda items for future sessions of the COP, CMA, SBI, and SBSTA. The CMP may have to undertake some minimal tasks, such as overseeing the work of the Clean Development Mechanism Executive Board, the Joint Implementation Supervisory Committee, and the Compliance Committee. The work of the CMP, should it need to continue meeting, will be minimal and procedural. Therefore, **Table 6** focuses only on the remaining bodies. This table is based on agenda items that recur because of the reporting obligations of the constituted bodies, or because annual work is mandated. There will be year by year variations as work programmes begin and end, or as bodies or guidance undergo a review (more on such future occurrences below). With the addition of the normal procedural items, there would be approximately 104 agenda items at a future COP. Even allowing for up to 10 new items for substantive issues (which is a generous allowance, as discussed below), there would be fewer agenda items than were seen at COP11 (117 agenda items, 2,788 Party participants), still in the post-Kyoto ‘normal’ range (see I.1.3).

**Table 6: Possible future agenda items**

Theme	COP	CMA	SBI	SBSTA
<b>Transparency</b>	Annex I Reporting under the Convention		Annex I reporting: a) Status of submission of national communications and biennial reports b) Compilations and syntheses c) Reports on national greenhouse gas inventories	Annual reports on technical reviews: a) Technical review on information reported under the Convention by Annex I Parties; b) Technical review on greenhouse gas inventories of Annex I Parties
	Non-Annex I Reporting under the Convention			
		Review of biennial transparency reports		Technical reviews of biennial transparency reports
<b>Adaptation</b>	Report of the Adaptation Committee	Report of the Adaptation Committee	Report of the Adaptation Committee	Report of the Adaptation Committee
	Matters Related to LDCs		National Adaptation Plans Matters Related to LDCs	
<b>Loss and damage</b>	Report of the Warsaw International Mechanism for loss and damage (WIM)	Report of the WIM	Report of the WIM	
<b>Finance</b>	Matters Relating to Finance: a) Standing Committee on Finance b) Report of and Guidance to the GCF c) Report of and Guidance to the GEF	Matters Relating to Finance: a) Standing Committee on Finance b) Report of and Guidance to the GCF c) Report of and Guidance to the GEF d) Adaptation Fund		
<b>Technology development and transfer</b>	Report of the Technology Executive Committee (TEC) and CTCN	Report of the TEC and CTCN	Development and Transfer of Technologies: a) Report of the TEC and CTCN b) Poznan Strategic Programme c) Paris Agreement technology framework	Report of the TEC and CTCN
<b>Capacity building</b>	Capacity-building under the Convention	Capacity-building under the Agreement	Report of the Paris Committee on Capacity Building	

**Table 6: Possible future agenda items (cont.)**

Theme	COP	CMA	SBI	SBSTA
<b>Response measures</b>	Response measures	Response measures	Response measures	Response measures
<b>Social issues</b>	Gender		Gender	
				Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples' Platform
<b>Scientific and methodological issues</b>				Methodological Issues under the Convention: a) Greenhouse gas data interface b) Common metrics to calculate the carbon dioxide equivalence of greenhouse gases c) Emissions from fuel used for international aviation and maritime transport
				Research and Systematic Observation

**Table 6** is an estimate, based on existing or likely future work. Mitigation appears absent. Perhaps there is an agenda item on the Secretariat’s report on the aggregate effect of NDCs every five years. Mitigation is ‘woven’ to an extent into other future events, such as the GST. The future of several issues, such as agriculture, is unknown. But there is a clear sense of the work already mandated until 2031, when common time frames begin, noting that a few other items, such as agriculture, may have ongoing work not currently mandated.

**Table 7** identifies the additional work that the COP and CMA will undertake up to 2030. It also identifies milestones in the NDC and transparency cycles, which may create periodic additional work for the COP and CMA. The transparency framework will involve reviews and mandated events related to the review of biennial transparency reports and the facilitative multilateral consideration of progress. The NDC cycle will likely not create new agenda items for the process (other than perhaps a review of the Secretariat’s report every five years), but could offer an opportunity for a high-level event when NDCs are submitted nine months before the COP. In the busiest years for negotiations, there are three additional items and the biennial ministerial dialogue on climate finance.

There may be some political choices to be made. But few that would seem to require high-level political input. Many relate to implementation details, such as reviews of the guidance under the Paris Agreement, or reports related to the constituted bodies. The collective finance goal and Article 6 could be the remaining issues that may require ministers to be involved in negotiations.

**Table 7: Additional work to be undertaken by the COP and CMA to 2030**

Year	NDC and Transp. Milestones	Negotiations			Other events
2020	Update first, or submit second, NDCs	Pre-2020 Work Programme	New collective finance goal	Second Periodic Review of the Long-term Global Goal	
2021			Technology Mechanism periodic assessment		
2022	1st Biennial Transparency Report (BTR)	SB57 consider guidance on adaptation comms from Adaptation Committee	Global Stocktake		
2023					High-Level Ministerial Dialogue
2024	2nd BTR Developing countries can submit BURs until 2024	Consideration of further guidance on features of NDCs Review modalities, procedures, and guidelines for Implementation and Compliance Committee			
2025	Communication/revision of 2nd/3rd NDCs	Revise adaptation communication guidance New collective finance goal to be set			High-Level Ministerial Dialogue
2026	3rd BTR				
2027		Technology Mechanism periodic assessment Review & update of information for clarity, transparency, and understanding (ICTU); and accounting guidance (NDCs)		Global Stocktake	High-Level Ministerial Dialogue
2028	4th BTR	Review & update of transparency MPGs no later than 2028			
2029					High-Level Ministerial Dialogue
2030	Communication/revision of third/fourth NDCs 5th BTR				

## 2. Functions of the Process after 2020

### 2.1. Decision making

Negotiations to realize a legally binding treaty or other major agreements or outcomes are historically a frequent feature of the UNFCCC. Negotiations for the Kyoto Protocol (1995-1998), the Marrakech Accords (1998-2001), post-2012 targets under the Kyoto Protocol (2005-2012), Copenhagen Accord (2007-2009), the Paris Agreement (2011-2015), and the Katowice Climate Package (2015-2018) have occupied much of the UNFCCC's history. With the Paris Agreement and its rulebook now in effect, the long phase of negotiations is largely over.

The future of the UNFCCC will be one of smaller, important, but technical decisions to be made by Parties.

**Rule development:** There will be few new rules to develop, unless Parties agree to initiate a process. Many of the remaining negotiation issues relate to reviewing, and perhaps fine tuning, the range of implementation guidance created to support the Paris Agreement. Parties are due to periodically review some aspects of the Paris Agreement rule book. Most of these reviews are scheduled to take place over a one- or two-year period. Setting the new collective finance goal is a five-year negotiation. The transparency modalities, procedures and guidelines (MPGs) review has a 2028 deadline for completion, but not a scheduled start date. Still, these will be periodic processes for a finite period.

The future of the process after 2020 is different from that of other bodies implementing agreements, such as the World Trade Organization (WTO). The WTO holds permanent negotiations in a single location. Given the work of the constituted bodies and operating entities, it is not clear that such an arrangement is preferable for the UNFCCC. The operating entities of the financial mechanism are their own organisations with their own meeting procedures. The constituted bodies already have rules of procedure in place and practices established for their work. Their mandates and work programmes do not require, or foresee, the need for permanent negotiation by Parties. They are to focus on implementation; ongoing negotiations could prove a distraction from that important task.

### 2.2. Implementation oversight and support

Most implementation is performed at the national level. Parties submit their NDCs and their national reports. The multilateral process has three primary implementation roles: facilitating the enhanced transparency framework, convening the GST, and overseeing the work of the constituted bodies and operating entities of the financial mechanism.

There will be some ongoing work to support the implementation of the enhanced transparency framework, including its facilitative, multilateral consideration of process. Similar to the multilateral assessment and the facilitative sharing of views under the Cancun transparency system, the facilitated consideration of multilateral progress will involve mandated events where Parties will share their progress and answer questions from their peers. Like the Cancun system, these events could occur twice a year at the intersessional

meeting and the CMA. This largely represents a replacement of work previously undertaken under the Cancun system, rather than an expansion of activities.

The GST is a two-year process occurring every five years. The first 18 months involves technical inputs, including a process that is, perhaps, similar to the Structured Expert Dialogue of the 2013-2015 Review. The CMA meeting occurring at the end of the two-year process will conduct a political phase, marking one of the few moments for high-level political engagement left in the post-2020 multilateral process.

The COP and CMA must review and note the reports and recommendations of some constituted bodies and agree to their future work programmes. Both bodies will have other procedural duties related to constituted bodies, such as approving the election of officers. Much of this work is already part of the regular work of the COP and CMA.

### **2.3. Facilitating ambition**

While facilitating ambition is a key future function, there is little room for the multilateral process to fulfil this function, particularly at COPs. The exception is the GST, a key part of the ratcheting-up mechanism of the Paris Agreement. Other than the GST, the facilitating of ambition will add no new agenda items, but it will stress the need for considered engagement by COP Presidencies and others who are able to informally create opportunities.

NDCs are due nine months before the relevant COP. Encouraging Parties to reflect the highest possible ambition at COPs could occur at the COP before the submission deadline. There is no formal space to do so – COP Presidencies will have to innovate.

Another option could be to hold a significant event at which Parties would submit their NDCs nine months before the relevant COP. The event could be informal and high level, an opportunity for ministers, or heads of state and government, to announce their NDCs. High-level engagement at the COP will be less effective, since new or updated NDCs will already have been submitted.

Other aspects of the post-2020 regime offer opportunities to facilitate ambition, if Parties make the most of the opportunities. The GST is designed to be a collective assessment of progress, an opportunity to renew resolve, and an occasion to identify areas that would benefit from further efforts. This may be an area where high-level engagement is appropriate, as discussed above. Ministers could be offered opportunities for announcements, beyond the poorly attended high-level segment. Interactions with the scientific community to better understand the outcomes of the technical phase could prove helpful for ministers. A smaller setting, such as the pre-COP could be ideal for such interactions.

The facilitative multilateral consideration of progress could help Parties identify areas for greater ambition among their peers. This could only work if Parties ask one another about climate ambition, potentially representing a new norm to cultivate. As with other items, facilitating ambition would take place through informal practice rather than formal discussions on the agenda.

## **2.4. Enhancing science-policy interface**

This is a rare area for expansion. Currently, the SBSTA Chair holds informal meetings with the IPCC and other experts and occasionally convenes informal events with members of the climate and biodiversity scientific communities.

The GST's technical phase will provide a new and recurring opportunity to strengthen the interface between science and policy, in a similar way that the Structured Expert Dialogue facilitated regular exchanges between the scientific and policy-making communities.

## **2.5. High-level engagement**

Part I of this Report highlighted various reasons for high-level engagement: delivering statements, advancing agreement, holding bilateral conversations, demonstrating commitment and momentum, networking, and increasing public attention. With these reasons in mind, there may be little need for ministerial involvement after 2020. Increasing public attention is discussed below, where we suggest that future COPs may not be well suited to this task.

On advancing agreement, there will be a few thorny negotiations that will require political intervention. Ministers are to meet every two years for ministerial dialogues on finance. Every five years, the GST has a political phase. In the immediate term, the new collective finance goal and Article 6 may benefit from ministerial intervention, but beyond these issues, few seem likely to require ministerial engagement.

The other functions – delivering statements, networking, discussing, and demonstrating momentum – are all closely linked with one another, but not necessarily to the COPs. The high-level segment is typically poorly attended. Other, more flexible forums could allow for climate-related discussions, perhaps with ministers holding a wider range of portfolios. Perhaps ministers could add high-level heft to a separate meeting of the Marrakech Partnership and build solidarity and commitment among countries and non-state actors. Given the effect of high-level segments on the size of meetings, the ministerial dialogues on finance could occur separately from COPs to bring together ministers to discuss climate finance. There is a range of options that can fulfil the functions of high-level engagement that do not necessitate their presence at COPs.

Every five years there could be a larger COP with high-level engagement for the political phase of the GST. The purpose of the GST is to galvanize an understanding of the effect of the Paris Agreement, and, in turn, a more ambitious response. This is an appropriate task for ministers.

## **2.6. Widening participation by non-Party stakeholders and general awareness raising**

There are multiple reasons to widen participation in the regime and to raise awareness. Public pressure can help states to realize compromises at the negotiation table, and to bring forward more ambitious NDCs. Widening participation involves more actors in the process,

encouraging new forms of mitigation and adaptation pledges (albeit with a lower level of scrutiny and reporting).

However, the post-2020 COPs may not provide a useful mechanism for either of these functions.

**Media interest.** Given the more technical nature of COPs, they may not be the best way to engage a wide range of stakeholders. As Part I observed, only the treaty COPs, and the recent Madrid meeting, attracted high levels of media interest. Even the important technical COPs that led to the Marrakech Accords and the Katowice Climate Package, were unsuccessful at garnering significant media presence. It is unlikely that future COPs, focused on implementation, will be opportunities for engagement with the media and, by extension, the public. Meanwhile, social movements attract considerable attention for their largely critical take on the UNFCCC.

**Stakeholder engagement.** The COP will have few agenda items related to stakeholder engagement, perhaps only the Action for Climate Empowerment Dialogue and reports of constituted bodies such as the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples' Platform. Participants representing the private sector, NGOs, cities, and others tend to arrive at the 'enormous COPs' when major outcomes are expected, because they want to be part of history or to use the platform to announce their own initiatives. The value of those public announcements may drop if the media is not there to spread the good news. Seemingly more mundane issues related to implementation may not create the interest that draws other actors to attend and create the 'coral reef' of activities outside the negotiations. For comparison, the UN Convention on Biological Diversity has been in 'implementation mode' for several years. Its most recent COP and MOPs in 2018 attracted 3,800 participants in total.

This is not to say that NGO participation is irrelevant in the future regime. At current intersessional meetings, NGOs attend and offer expert advice and provide capacity building support to some delegations. This subset of NGOs will continue to have a role as important sources of information, transparency, and legitimacy for the future regime.

**Widening participation.** Courting a wide range of stakeholders and, concurrently the media, at a COP may become a double-edged sword. These stakeholders demand tangible signs of climate action and major commitments. Over the next years, the agenda will be pared down, focused on implementation details, and unable to deliver on such external calls. As we saw at COP25, this led to questions of whether the UNFCCC could deliver. After 2020, there will be few opportunities to showcase action by Parties; essentially, the GST is the only forum and meaningful political moment for climate ambition. This leaves the UNFCCC exposed to questions of its legitimacy, when it has little or no mandate for ensuring Parties undertake the highest level of ambition.

It may, therefore, be prudent to engage stakeholders in an alternative, flexible forum where they could showcase their contributions to climate action. The Marrakech Partnership and parallel events are the primary means of widening participation and facilitating information exchange among Parties and with non-Party stakeholders. These events are dynamic and can yield commitments from major corporations, cities, investors, and institutions such as Central

Banks. None of these events is central to the business of the COP and they could benefit from their own stage. Parties and non-Party stakeholders could benefit from dedicated time and networking opportunities without negotiations occurring in the background.

The new event would be under the aegis of the UNFCCC and represent a second major event in the UNFCCC calendar. Ministers would benefit from interacting with a wide range of stakeholders. The process would benefit from a second event that could help galvanize momentum and high-level engagement. Non-Party stakeholders would have the floor, so to speak: dedicated time, attention, and space would be available to reflect on and further their climate action without the distractions of various negotiations and other technical events. As non-Party stakeholders mingle with ministers and other state delegates, new ideas and connections could help create innovative climate solutions

## V. Conclusion: Become Settled and Fit for Purpose

Given the analysis above, the short answer proposed in this Report to its title question ‘Quo Vadis COP?’, in its literal meaning, is: ‘to Bonn, and (mostly) staying there’.

This can only be achieved if the size of COP sessions, currently at around 20,000, is reduced to the post-Kyoto normal of 5,000 (see II.2.1). We argue this can be achieved by relocating the Global Climate Action events (held mostly in the ‘Green Zone’) and the high-level political attendance (High-Level Segments) from COP sessions to a new annual UNFCCC flagship event: the ‘Global Climate Action Weeks’ (GCAWs).

This, we believe, is the natural next step following the introduction of a different type of participation for the Climate Action events at COP 23 (see Part II) – at this COP, the logistics of the ‘Green Zone’ were managed by the host country – Government of Germany – which managed the ‘Green Zone’.<sup>21</sup> According to personal feedback from a head of delegation at the time, this had *“the important advantage that we could clearly separate the delegation into the delegation that participates at the negotiations and those that participate at side events: At home, it is always very difficult to justify the big delegation at climate COPs, by having those participating at sides events on a different list with different badge, the negotiation delegation became much smaller and its size was much easier accepted.”*

As regards timing and frequency of these settled fit for purpose (SFP) COP sessions, the proposal is to retain current timing and frequency (annually, in November) and revisit whether changes need to be made in 2028, in parallel with the second GST.<sup>22</sup>

### I. High-level involvement, GST-COPs and ‘Global CC Summits’

There have been three types of high-level (ministerial or above) political interventions in the multilateral climate change process:

- (i) Ceremonial (Heads of State or Government)
- (ii) Informative (Ministerial statements during the High-Level Segments)
- (iii) Decision-making (breaking negotiation deadlocks)

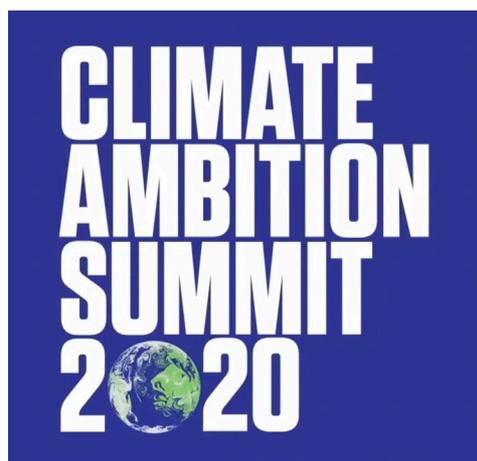
It stands to reason that the first two are not really essential to the core business of future COP sessions – taking multilateral decisions regarding the implementation of the Paris Agreement. But clearly, breaking negotiation deadlocks does pertain to this core business. Does this mean that there needs to be high-level participation at (each and every) COP Session? No.

The process has many precedents in which negotiation deadlocks were resolved politically, without physical high-level meetings. And given the way in which virtual (high-level) meetings have become an everyday occurrence under the COVID 19 pandemic, there should be no problem with handling negotiation deadlocks in that manner, if and when they occur.

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<sup>21</sup> While legally speaking the ‘Green Zone’ was not under the jurisdiction of the UN, the arrangement with the host country was that the UNFCCC would use its registration system and security standards and the host country would manage the logistics.

<sup>22</sup> For example, if there is not enough decision-making time, one could hold the annual COP sessions in two parts, adding a first part to the mid-year SB Sessions in Bonn.



Moreover, it is always possible to break deadlocks intersessionally, be that at the High-level Segments during the Global Climate Action Weeks, or at pre-COPs.

Having said this, there are times when a co-location of the first two types of political interventions could be beneficial for the process, for instance, during GSTs. The function of the GSTs is to inform Parties about their determination of their next NDCs. The GST is a COP event, but to have sufficient impact, it may need to be a bigger, more political, setting than a purely

technical COP, in which case it could be held in conjunction with that year's GCAW.

There may be occasions, such as in the 'submission and communication years' of the Paris Agreement,<sup>23</sup> when highest-level participation could be deemed appropriate as part of an 'NDC-submission High-level Segment' during the GCAW (which would entail a spring date). But we believe Geneva would still be the most effective and efficient location for what then could be termed a 'Climate Ambition Summits, such as the [one held virtually on 12 December 2020](#).

## 2. Stakeholder engagement

Civil society engagement in the multilateral process remains essential in the post-2020 Paris implementation phase. At the same time, it is clear that current COP participation figures are not compatible with holding the COP sessions in Bonn. Does this mean that the COP cannot be settled down in Bonn without imposing draconian restrictions on observer participation?

Our analysis of the drivers of COP participation figures confirms the common-sense hypothesis that not all observers at current COP sessions are interested in the nitty-gritty of the negotiations, particularly if these sessions are purely technical. Indeed, we believe that – apart from those who are also attending the Bonn SB Sessions – most of these observers will migrate with the Global Climate Action events and the High-level Segments, which will make the GCAWs much more newsworthy than the purely technical small-scale COPs in Bonn (see I.3.2).

What about those observers whose primary motivation for participation is neither to influence the negotiations nor to participate in climate action events, but to lobby national governments? It stands to reason that there will be a fair number of national policy makers at the GCAWs, if only in connection with the High-level Segments, and that they will have more time to interact with observers, not having to attend negotiations.

Having said this, there are also NGOs who are deeply engaged in the negotiations and who have traditionally been sources of expertise and capacity for delegations. They have provided

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<sup>23</sup> Article 4.9 of the [Paris Agreement](#) requires Parties to communicate a pledge ('Nationally Determined contribution' or 'NDC') every five years, while implementation [Decision CP21/1](#) (paragraph 25), mandates them to submit their NDCs to the UNFCCC Secretariat, 9 to 12 months before the relevant COP.

new ideas that have helped set the agenda. These NGOs will have usually also participated in the mid-year SB sessions in Bonn, and could therefore be accommodated in the proposed slimmed-down technical COPs and continue to help review and provide expertise regarding the technicalities that Parties debate. Further, these NGOs will provide transparency to the process.

### 3. Global Climate Action Weeks: A new annual flagship event

#### 3.1. Background: The Marrakech Partnership

The Marrakech Partnership for Global Climate Action (‘Marrakech Partnership’) was launched at COP22 (Marrakech, November 2016) by the two High-level Climate Champions

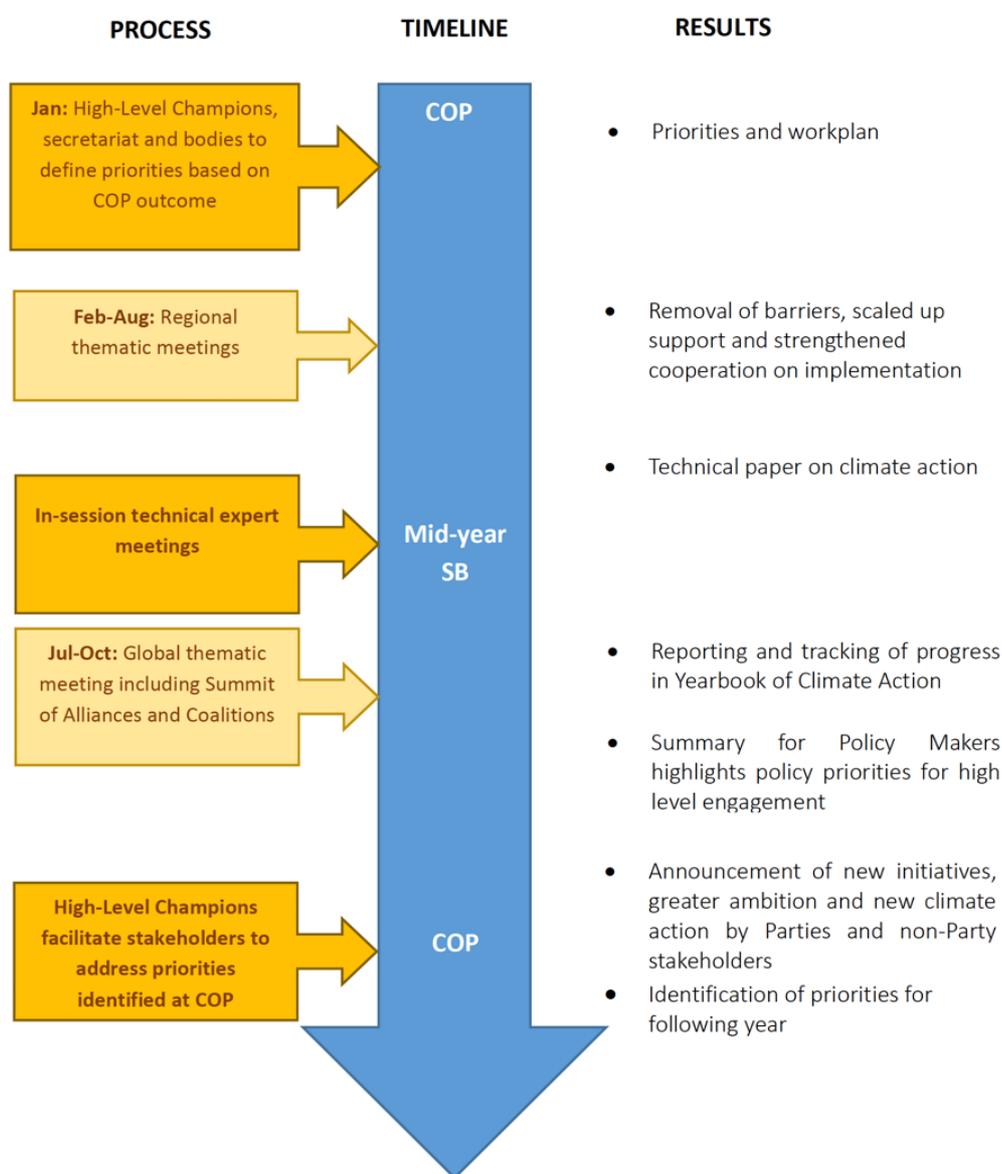


Figure 10. Annual engagement cycle

Source: UNFCCC (2016). [Marrakech Partnership for Global Climate Action](#). Figure 2, p.8

Hakima el Haite (COP22) and Laurence Tubiana (COP21). According to the [launch document](#) it is “*designed to provide a strong foundation for how the UNFCCC process will catalyse and support climate action by Parties and non-Party stakeholders [and] is complementary and in no way a substitute for negotiations among Parties*” [pp.1-2].

The Marrakech Partnership is intended to enable:

- The convening of stakeholders on an ongoing basis to enhance collaboration and catalyse the scaling up of efforts to collectively identify and address barriers to enhanced implementation, including through the technical examination processes on pre-2020 climate action and multi stakeholder high-level dialogues.
- The showcasing of successes and providing a platform for new initiatives and greater ambition through events, including those held in conjunction with sessions of UNFCCC bodies as well as other relevant forums, culminating in the annual High-level Event on Climate Action to be held in conjunction with each session of the COP.
- Tracking of progress, through [NAZCA](#), achieved by those actors and initiatives, aligned towards the achievement of the purpose and goals of the Paris Agreement, and supporting the delivery of NDCs and the Sustainable Development Goals.
- Reporting achievements and options to enhance action to the COP.

According to the launch document of the Marrakech Partnership: “*Delivering these functions requires the active collaboration of all stakeholders, UNFCCC institutions and the United Nations system. To this end the appointed High-Level Champions will work closely with the COP President, the Secretary General of the United Nations and the UNFCCC Executive Secretary*”. [[Marrakech Partnership for Global Climate Action](#), p.3]

**Figure 10** describes the envisaged ‘annual engagement cycle’ including a ‘global thematic meeting’ that was meant to happen between the mid-year SB sessions and the COP sessions, in addition to the ‘regional thematic meetings’.

However, these global meetings never took place. Instead, there has been an annual series of Marrakech Partnership events during the COP sessions under the ‘[Global Climate Action](#)’ umbrella, which includes both the Marrakech Partnership and the Regional Climate Weeks.

### 3.2. Background: Global Climate Action events at the COP

At COP25 in Madrid (December 2019) the events carried out under the [UNFCCC Global Climate Action](#) (GCA) umbrella included “*Davos-style events, roundtable discussions, TED-style talks, video competitions, focus group-style events, demo events, and the Global Climate Action Awards Ceremony*”,<sup>24</sup> clustered into four categories:

- [Action Hub events](#) (guided by the COP Presidency)
- [Marrakech Partnership events](#) (led by the high-level Champions)
- [Young and Future Generations Day](#)
- GCA ‘Headline’ events

All of these were organized by the UNFCCC Secretariat and took place in the ‘Green (Climate Action) Zone’, apart from the high-level event of Marrakech Partnership, which was

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<sup>24</sup> See [Global Climate Action at COP 25: full programme](#).

[held](#) in the ‘Blue (UN) Zone’ on Wednesday of the second week, during the final day of the High-Level Segment, to provide political visibility to the Partnership.

### 3.3. The GCAW Design

**Who is in charge?** It stands to reason that same people who are in charge of the elements (the High-Level Segment and the activities carried out under the Global Climate Action agenda) that are moved from the COP sessions to the GCAWs should be in charge of the GCAWs (the respective COP Presidencies, the host countries, and the High-Level Champions), and that the event should be held under the aegis of the UNFCCC Secretariat.

**Remit and Outputs.** It is important to emphasize that the supreme bodies of the multilateral climate change regime, here simply referred to as ‘COP’, are the only bodies with decision-making power in the multilateral climate regime. In particular, the new GCAWs are not meant to take decisions for the multilateral regime. Of course, the high-level participants attending could issue a political declaration, but this would be without legal force as concerns the multilateral negotiations.

While these GCAWs are meant to be a useful forum where ministers could gather informally to discuss issues important to the multilateral negotiations (such as those held in 2015 to unlock key issues in the Paris Agreement negotiations), this would happen purely informally, and only as required.

**Timing and frequency.** The GCAW could become the host for the ‘*Global thematic meeting including a Summit of Alliances and coalitions*’ originally envisaged in the annual engagement cycle of the Marrakech Partnership (see **Figure 10**), in the same way in which the envisaged ‘regional thematic meetings’ of the Partnership now happen in the context of the UNFCCC-organized [Regional Climate Weeks](#).<sup>25</sup> As such it would be an annual event before the COP (between July and October).

**Location.** The expectation is that the GCAWs will attract a large number of participants, on a par with the current ‘post-Paris’ scale of around 20,000. To be able to host the GCAWs, a location must therefore have the logistical capacity and support to accommodate a gathering of that scale. Moreover, the planned high-level political attendance will be facilitated with appropriate diplomatic infrastructure.

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<sup>25</sup> See [Work Programme 2020–2021: Strategic Engagement](#).



Geneva, the original location of the UNFCCC Secretariat, would have the requisite infrastructure, both logistically and diplomatically, with its permanent UN Missions. Holding the GCAW in Geneva would also complement the Regional Climate Weeks in Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Middle East and Northern Africa, and the Asia-Pacific region.

**Permanence.** Should the GCAWs move around the globe, or stay in one place? Would it not, for example, be beneficial for the Climate Action agenda to gain regional buy-in and attention if it

were to move between the UN regions, as it currently does with the COPs?

Given the Regional Climate Weeks, as well as the possibilities for global virtual access, it stands to reason that regional buy-in can be adequately fostered without continuing to hold roaming mega climate events, such as the current COP sessions.

So to further ‘settle-down’ the process, the proposal here is to follow Rule 3 of the [UNFCCC draft rules of procedure](#) and decide on a default location (in this case Geneva), unless the COP “*decides otherwise or other appropriate arrangements are made by the secretariat in consultation with the Parties*”. One such deviation that might be contemplated is to rotate the GCA Summit Weeks among the UN Regions every GST.

### 3.4. Cost implications

The proposed ‘slim- and settle-down’ model has a number of advantages, such as allowing all Parties to take on COP Presidencies, as well as lowering the pressure on COP Presidencies to deliver a signature outcome at each session. However, possibly the most important advantage over the status quo model are the costs. At present, most of the costs for COPs, apart from Secretariat staff salaries and certain conference services (such as interpretation and translation/distribution of documents), are paid by the host country.

The Secretariat estimates that a COP without a high-level segment in Bonn would cost €6-8 million.<sup>26</sup> This estimate is based on the cost of mid-year SB sessions and on the assumption of a COP size that is two to four times the size of the mid-year SBs (8,000-16,000 participants), which in our taxonomy would not be a small, but a large-to-enormous COP. The slim- and settle-down model proposed here is predicated on returning to the ‘post-Kyoto normal’ small COPs with less than 5,000 participants. Using the Secretariat methodology, our estimate would therefore be €3.75 million.<sup>27</sup> This could either be covered by a 12.5 per cent increase of the Secretariat core budget, or by the respective COP Presidencies.

<sup>26</sup> See [AIM 2015, §40]

<sup>27</sup> On average, there have been just under 4’000 participants (all inclusive) at mid-year SBs over the past ten years, which means a cost of €750/participant (€3m/4000), implying €3.75 million for 5’000 participants

Of course, this does not mean that this is the total cost of our proposal, which also includes the Geneva-based Global Climate Action Weeks. It is not easy to give a cost estimate for these new flagship events, but the organizational and logistics costs of the recent COP sessions, covered by the host countries, may give an indication. The Secretariat has estimated<sup>28</sup> that for recent COP sessions these costs have been between €35-150 million, which is in line with €117 million reported by the government of Germany for support and implementation of COP23 (see II.1.2).

Being themselves permanently located in Geneva would clearly make the costs more predictable. Indeed, it stands to reason that due to ‘economies of routine’ the costs would be at the lower end of the spectrum discussed by the Secretariat.

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<sup>28</sup> Op. cit.

# Appendices

## I. References

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## 2. Abbreviations

AIM	Arrangements for Intergovernmental Meetings
AOSIS	Alliance of Small Island States
APA	Ad Hoc Working Group on the Advancement of the Paris Agreement
CDM	Clean Development Mechanism
CMA	Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement
CMP	Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol
COP	Conference of the Parties (in this document, COP is used as a shorthand designation for all the supreme bodies of the multilateral climate change regime)
CTCN	Centre for Climate Technology and Network
GCA	Global Climate Action
GCAW	Global Climate Action Week
GCF	Green Climate Fund
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GHG	Greenhouse gas
GST	Global stocktake
ICTU	Intention to facilitate clarity, transparency and understanding
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
LDC	Least developed country
MOP	Meeting of the Parties
MPG	Modalities, procedures, and guidelines
MPGCA	Marrakech Partnership for Global Climate Action
NAZCA	Non-State Actor Zone for Climate Action
NDC	Nationally determined contribution
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OCP	Oxford Climate Policy
REDD+	Reduce Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation in developing countries
SB	Subsidiary Body
SBI	Subsidiary Body for Implementation
SBSTA	Subsidiary body for Scientific and Technological advice
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SSD	Slim-&Settle-Down
TEC	Technology Executive Committee
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
WCC	World Conference Centre
WIM	The Warsaw International Mechanism for loss and damage