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# Nature at the Heart: Regions Paving the Way for Multilevel Governance across UN Global Agendas

*Engaging in NBSAP, NDC/NAPs, and VNR Updating and Reviewing Processes.*



An exclusive learning session for Regions4 Biodiversity Learning Platform, RegionsAdapt and Regions4 SDGs Communities of Practice

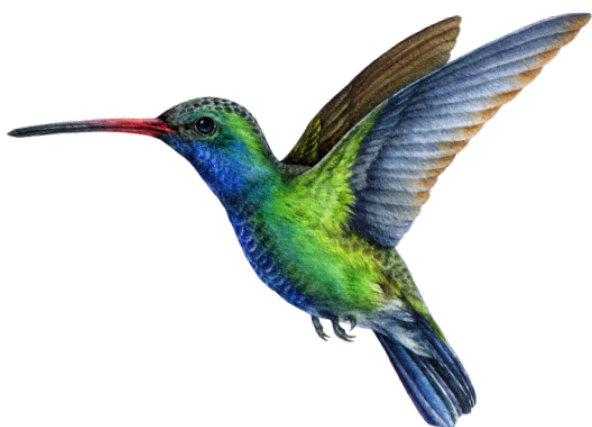
# Nature at the Heart: Regions Paving the Way for Multilevel Governance across UN Global Agendas

## Engaging in NBSAP, NDC/NAPs, and VNR Updating and Reviewing Processes

### Introduction

The joint session, titled 'Nature at Heart: Paving the Way for Multilevel Governance Across UN Global Agendas,' was held on May 7th, 2024, and organized collaboratively by R4BLP, RegionsAdapt, and Regions4SDGs Communities of Practice.

The session featured presentations by guest experts Felix Dodds, moderator, and Mauricio Luna from the NAP Global Network. Additionally, representatives from Regions4 members including the State of Rio de Janeiro, Province of Gauteng, Basque Country, Aaland Island, and CONGOPE, shared presentations on their contribution to National Adaptation Plans (NAP) and Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) processes, National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAP) update and revision and Voluntary National Reviews (VNR).



Ecuador, one of the world's megadiverse countries, is home to almost half of the 330 known species of hummingbirds worldwide. Despite their small size, these birds are fundamental to biodiversity due to their role as pollinators. Ecuadorian hummingbirds can be found from sea level up to the highest mountains; the province of Chimborazo boasts the largest concentrations.

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **Multilevel governance** involves distributing power vertically across different levels of government and horizontally among various actors, including governments, civil society, and businesses. Vertical integration emphasizes strategic linkages between national and subnational governance to enhance planning, implementation, and monitoring of initiatives like the global agendas. On the other hand, horizontal integration speaks about the importance of effective consultation processes and coordinated action and the engagement of stakeholders at all stages of the policy process.
- **Key enabling factors for vertical integration** that have proven essential in the implementation phase of Adaptation Plans and that can be useful for translating strategies into action are high-level political leadership and engagement; institutional arrangements that allow for actors at all levels to act in a harmonized manner; stakeholder engagement, especially with local communities and indigenous peoples; data communication, skills and capacity building, and financial support.
- **Regional governments hold a unique role as bridges in multilevel governance**, facilitating the development of strategies by municipalities and other local authorities. Regional and subnational leaders can play a role in supporting the alignment of these strategies with national policy instruments, and ultimately, global, and national targets.
- **Embracing innovative tools and technologies**, like the [Green Eye initiative by Rio de Janeiro](#), is key to advancing biodiversity, climate, and sustainable development efforts. By leveraging cutting-edge solutions, governments can enhance monitoring, decision-making, and implementation processes, leading to more impactful outcomes.

## Background

Multilevel governance has emerged as key on the global agendas addressing pressing environmental challenges. The next two years stand as a pivotal moment, offering subnational and regional governments a unique opportunity to shape national processes and drive impactful change on a global scale. Gathering the RegionsAdapt and the SDGs communities of practice and the Regions4 Biodiversity Learning Platform in exploring these themes was key to better understanding the role regional leaders are playing.

At the global level, the Biodiversity, Climate, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are agendas that share objectives to strengthen resilience, build adaptive capacity and reduce vulnerability to climate change and biodiversity crisis, putting human development on a more sustainable pathway.

The momentum generated at the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD COP15) (Montreal, December 2022) has sparked a movement that elevates nature to the forefront of discussions within the UNFCCC framework, fostering a harmonized approach across various UN Conventions. Notably, the sixth meeting of the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA-6) centered on the theme of effective, inclusive, and sustainable multilateral actions to combat climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution. The inclusion of a dedicated 'Multilateral Environmental Agreements Day' underscores the growing recognition of the interconnectedness of environmental issues. Subnational examples showcased during the learning session highlighted the efficacy of fostering synergies and adopting a coordinated approach, amplifying the impact of climate, nature, and development actions.

At the upcoming CBD COP16, nations are mandated to share their National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) in alignment with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. Integrating, as far as possible and as appropriate, the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity into relevant sectoral or cross-sectoral plans, programmes, and policies.

Concurrently, governments are revising their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) under the UNFCCC, with updates expected at COP30 in Brazil in November 2025. Additionally, thirty countries are slated to present their Voluntary National Reviews at the High-Level Political Forum in July, offering insights into progress on key SDGs, including Goal 13 on climate action.

These milestones provide an opportunity to align efforts and underscore the critical role of subnational and regional governments in advancing biodiversity and nature-based solutions as integral components of holistic environmental and human development strategies. Collaboration across ministries and government levels is imperative for effective coordination, with subnational governments serving as crucial conduits between different levels of government and stakeholders.

In exploring diverse examples of alignment across various agendas, this session showcases the pivotal role of subnational governments as facilitators of collaboration and drivers of transformative change on the global environmental stage.



The Golden lion tamarin (*Leontopithecus rosalia*) is one of the simian species being protected at the Rio de Janeiro Primatology Center. The simians that live at the Center form a gene bank that supports colonies of Brazilian primates, contributing to numerous conservation programs in the country.

## Guest expert

### Lessons learnt from the NAP Process, guest expert Mauricio Luna, NAP Global Network

The presentation provided insights into multi-level governance within global agendas, drawing from experiences in the National Adaptation Plan (NAP) process.

Multi-level governance involves distributing power vertically across different levels of government and horizontally among various actors, including governments, civil society, and businesses. Vertical integration, especially in adaptation processes, emphasizes strategic linkages between national and subnational governance to enhance planning, implementation, and monitoring of initiatives like climate change adaptation.

This approach not only improves adaptation efforts but can also be applied to other areas such as biodiversity conservation and achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). By aligning local actions with subnational and national goals, which in turn impact global targets like Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs), vertical integration becomes a critical strategy for addressing complex global challenges.

Key entry points for enhancing vertical integration include involving diverse actors in planning, mainstreaming adaptation priorities into development strategies and budgets, and establishing robust monitoring and evaluation systems.

Key enabling factors such as high-level political leadership, institutional arrangements, stakeholder engagement, data communication, skills and capacity building, and financial support were highlighted as crucial for effective implementation.

In summary, the presentation underscores the significance of multi-level governance in addressing global challenges and leveraging nature, such as through ecosystem-based approaches, for sustainable development. Collaboration across various levels and sectors is essential for effectively tackling complex issues on a global scale.



The NAP Network focuses on three pillars: supporting countries in adaptation processes, facilitating South-South learning exchange, and producing knowledge products. Explore their latest publication [here](#).

### Enabling factors

 <p><b>Leadership</b></p>	<p>Involve high-level political leadership and "champions" who are committed to supporting coordinated adaptation across levels</p>
 <p><b>Institutional arrangements</b></p>	<p>Strengthen existing and new coordination mechanisms between national and sub-national governance levels</p>
 <p><b>Engagement</b></p>	<p>Involve diverse actors at all governance levels, including sub-national governments, CSOs, businesses, academia, media, and local communities</p>
 <p><b>Data, knowledge, and communications</b></p>	<p>Facilitate continuous, two-way information sharing between national and sub-national actors</p>
 <p><b>Skills and capacities</b></p>	<p>Enhance climate-related and context-specific institutional and human competencies at sub-national levels</p>
 <p><b>Financing</b></p>	<p>Incorporate climate-resilience considerations into finance allocation processes, such as government budgeting across levels</p>

## Shared Experiences from Regional Governments

### Rio de Janeiro | Integrating National, Subnational and Local Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans

In 2023, the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change, in partnership with [ABEMA](#) and the National Association of Municipalities and Environment in Brazil, started facilitating the a process to integrate and harmonize the biodiversity strategy at the national, subnational and local levels. The federal government initiated a public consultation to gather input for updating the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) and organized meetings with subnational governments through ABEMA. This collaborative effort aimed to assist state governments, including Rio de Janeiro, in formulating their biodiversity strategies and action plans based on a methodological roadmap developed in close partnership with the federal government to ensure coherence and integration. Rio de Janeiro's objective is to finalize the first version of its State Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan by September 2024.

The intervention underscored Rio de Janeiro's unique position as a stronghold for biodiversity, particularly its significant proportion of preserved Atlantic Forest. In this context, the region is actively involved in supporting the updating of municipal plans for conservation and recovery of the Atlantic rainforest, known as PMA or Planos de Mata Atlantica. This support is based on an adapted methodological roadmap, ensuring that the process results in the elaboration of local biodiversity strategies and action plans in collaboration with municipalities. By 2026, Rio de Janeiro aims to have all municipalities in the state with their Mata Atlantica plans in place.

Additionally, Rio de Janeiro highlighted successful initiatives such as the ProUC program, which

supports municipal conservation units, and the ICMS Ecológico, providing financial incentives for environmental conservation efforts. Notable achievements include reaching the 30x30 target for protected areas and a significant reduction in deforestation since 2010. These successes are attributed in part to innovative programs like Green Eye, which uses satellite imagery for real-time monitoring and detection of deforestation, and which also has a component of multilevel partnership.

The intervention emphasized the crucial role of multilevel and integrated planning in protecting biodiversity, promoting sustainable development, and engaging local communities. The benefit of this coordinated process between the state and local government is the regionalized approach, allowing connectivity between local, state and federal conservation units. Rio de Janeiro also highlighted key challenges such as the need for high-level political leadership, capacity building, policy coherence, and resource mobilization.



RIO COP15



PMMA



## Gauteng | Gauteng's Experience on Multilevel Governance and Implementation of NAPs and NDCs

Multilevel governance is a crucial aspect of Gauteng's approach to addressing climate change. With approximately 50 million residents concentrated in Johannesburg, Tshwane, and Ekurhuleni cities, South Africa's most populous province faces significant climate risks such as heatwaves, intense rainfall, and drought, exacerbated by carbon-intensive industries.

To tackle these challenges, Gauteng City Region has approved in 2020 its [Climate Change Response Strategy and Action Plan](#), aligned with the country's national climate change bill and commitments to meet the Paris Agreements through its NDC targets, and based on the climate and socioeconomic vulnerability assessment. This strategy prioritizes 11 key programmes to accelerate climate action.

A key aspect of Gauteng's climate action framework is its emphasis on collaboration and partnership. The Climate Change Quarterly Forum and annual Climate Change Indaba summit bring officials together to share knowledge, monitor progress, and involve the private sector, ensuring broader engagement and a coordinated approach. The Kaalspruit catchment management plan, stemming from a national climate change program involving six subregional governments, is a prime example of a regional project addressing water-related climate risks. Its success has gained international recognition, with support from organizations like the World Bank and the National Treasury.

Other notable adaptation programs include the Climate Change School Awareness program, focusing on climate literacy in disadvantaged schools, Greening initiatives for marginalized communities, and the development of sustainable urban drainage systems (SUDs) implementation manuals to tackle flooding systematically at the provincial and municipal levels.

At the national level, South Africa's approach to climate governance involves collaborative platforms such as Working Group 9 and the Climate Change Adaptation Technical Working Group, which facilitate dialogue and coordination between national, sub-national, and local authorities, as well as research institutions and the private sector. This collaborative approach is reflected in the development of the National Adaptation Strategy, which integrates inputs from provincial and local adaptation plans, ensuring a cohesive and inclusive national response to climate change. Additionally, during the development of the NDC and the climate change bill, extensive consultative processes at the subnational level engaged stakeholders at various levels to incorporate their inputs.



## Basque Country | 7th Voluntary Report: Basque Green Deal, Basque Country 2030 Agenda, and Environmental Framework Programme Interaction

Voluntary local reviews don't have official recognition by the UN, but their impact in bolstering the role of states, regions, and cities in SDG implementation is increasingly recognized by the international community. The Basque Country is presenting its voluntary report for the 7th consecutive year, demonstrating how a regional government can deliver impactful actions in support of integrated, multilevel governance, and can value them through regular reporting efforts.

The Basque report reflects efforts to coordinate a complexity of measures that span across all governmental competencies. These efforts set the groundwork for integrating agendas on Climate – recently addressed by the new Energy Transition and Climate Change Law – as well as Biodiversity – with the Biodiversity 2030 strategy – and all other SDG-related topics. Overarching SDG implementation tools include the Basque Green Deal (2021), which outlines a transition roadmap for five key areas, and the Environmental Framework Program (2023), with its six challenges and eight transformative projects supporting cohesion, circularity, sustainable finance, and the transition of SMEs, among others.

Four axes guide SDG implementation: outreach, coordination, prioritization, and evaluation. Awareness-raising and citizen involvement campaigns are thus combined with stakeholder engagement activities, with the Agenda 2030 Forum at their core. This multi-stakeholder platform allows for Civil Society participation, as well as coordination among levels of government, with provincial councils and the councils of the three Basque capitals directly involved. Besides exchanging information and practices, stakeholders took part in defining the seven key commitments and the seven flagship projects, ranging from areas as varied as equality, climate, and peace, as part of prioritization efforts by the

Basque government. The voluntary report contributes to the evaluation axis.

A focus is placed on the Basque plan for SDG localization. Four enablers will be activated: an executive body for coordination around the SDGs, aimed at supervising the alignment of all involved organizations' targets; comprehensive strategic planning documents providing concrete objectives, action plans, timetables, and evaluation criteria, as well as associated budgetary items; evaluation tools adapted to the regional reality, including annual reports to show progress towards the targets; and models of governance promoting inter-institutional and social collaboration to close the existing coordination gap with social institutions.

To account for all of this, the Basque report is structured into two parts: a panoramic view of how the Basque framework evolved in 2023, and a second part focusing on concrete actions delivered for each SDG. Two annexes show the government's 2024 budget alignment to the SDGs and the data of regional monitoring indicators. For the first time, the provincial and capital councils were directly involved. Through the voluntary review, the Basque Country contributes once more to showcasing the huge potential of subnational governments to guide SDG implementation, mobilize local actors, integrate multilevel governance, and report on progress.



## Fireside chat with members

### MAGEPAN

The Strategic Management Manual for Natural Heritage (MAGEPAN) was born out of the need to train provincial and local governments in Ecuador on the connection between climate challenges, biodiversity loss, and sustainable development. Led by CONGOPE, MAGEPAN is a guide and a technical tool that allows users to identify opportunities and solutions to challenges related to biodiversity, fragile ecosystems, restoration, conservation, wildlife, governance, among others. Its main objective is to serve as a guide and facilitate the replication of good environmental management practices, enabling users to promote better coordination actions at the local and provincial levels, in harmony with national objectives.

The manual is a useful tool to build and strengthen technical capacities at the provincial and local levels and can inspire other associations of governments to build such tools.

Learn more: The Consortium of Autonomous Provincial Governments of Ecuador (CONGOPE) is an institution specialized in building capacities for public management of provincial intermediate governments, promoting decentralization, autonomy, closing territorial gaps, and sustainable development. The MAGEPAN is available in Spanish here: <http://www.congope.gob.ec/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/ambiente001.pdf>

### ÅLAND'S VOLUNTARY LOCAL REVIEW

In 2024, the Sustainability Network of Åland Islands decided to produce a Voluntary Local Review in addition to the annual "status report". While the latter is a document presented by the Network secretariat and addressed to all local actors, including the Åland provincial government, a Voluntary Local Review has a different dynamic and objective. It will be officially delivered by the government itself and addressed, in the first place, to the international community. The aim is to present the work done since 2015, thus creating opportunities for peer learning and collaboration. Commitment to SDGs in Åland stems from the awareness that humans can't exist but in balance with the rest of Nature, and from adopting the guiding vision called "Everyone can flourish on the islands of peace".

The Åland governance model supports a more deliberative democracy but also more independence of sustainable development commitments from political leadership, thus increasing the continuity of efforts. The "Everyone can flourish" initiative, inspired by the Harvard flourishing index, has raised interest outside Åland and has potential for scaling up to a global movement for inclusion and peace. The 2024 Voluntary Local Review is an investment to launch this vision and ignite dissemination and interaction among regions in the world.

To learn more: <https://www.barkraft.ax/english/everyone-can-flourish-new-vision->



## References and useful links

- ➔ Recording and content shared by speakers during our webinar can be accessed [here](#).
- Luna Rodríguez, M., Ledwell, C., & Bankole, O. (2023). Progress on vertical integration in national adaptation plan (NAP) processes: Analysis of strategic linkages between national and sub-national levels (NAP Global Network synthesis report). International Institute for Sustainable Development. [www.napglobalnetwork.org](http://www.napglobalnetwork.org)
  - National Biodiversity Strategies Accelerator Partnership, <https://nbsapaccelerator.org>
  - RegionsAdapt latest tool, sharing regional progress on adaptation planning and actions: [RegionsAdapt Regional Adaptation Tracker – Regions4](#)
  - [PT] Rio de Janeiro, “Olho no verde” Project, <https://www.inea.rj.gov.br/olho-no-verde/> Data on the Project can be found at the Plataforma Ambiente+, <https://shorturl.at/cqGWY>
  - [EN] Information on the Basque Green Deal: <https://www.ihobe.eus/news/the-basque-green-deal-the-basque-model-for-just-and-sustainable-economic-development> and the Basque Environmental Framework Programme: <https://www.ihobe.eus/2030-environmental-framework-programme-of-the-basque-country>
  - [ES] General information on the implementation of Agenda 2030 in the Basque Country: <https://www.euskadi.eus/agenda-2030/web01-a2lehetr/es/>
  - [SPA] The MAGEPAN is available here: <http://www.congope.gob.ec/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/ambiente001.pdf>
  - [EN] “Everyone can Flourish” by Aland Islands: <https://www.barkraft.ax/english/everyone-can-flourish-new-vision-aland>

## ABOUT THIS BRIEF FOR ACTION

*This brief for action is part of a series aiming to inform Regions4 members on key results and recommendations based on Regions4 research and Community of Practice sessions.*

- *The **Regions4 Biodiversity Learning Platform (R4BLP)** fosters knowledge exchange for sustainable biodiversity use and conservation, supporting global advocacy efforts.*
- ***RegionsAdapt** is Regions4 climate initiative gathering more than 75 regional governments. It mobilizes ambition and action on climate adaptation by facilitating access to the latest innovations, tools, and best practices at the regional level. **RegionsAdapt Community of Practice** offers a space for regional governments to present their expertise and to learn from each other, discuss and engage, on a series of learning session on focused topics on adaptation, so as to help them gain capacity and improve their own policies and activities on adaptation.*
- ***Regions4SDGs Community of Practice** aims to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, strengthen territorial approaches, as well as integrate regional processes to achieve of the global goals. This platform offers a collaborative experience, catalyzing synergies among regions worldwide, and fostering policy coordination, collective implementation, monitoring, and follow-up.*

*For more information on the initiative, please visit: <https://regions4.org/our-work/what-we-do/>*

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