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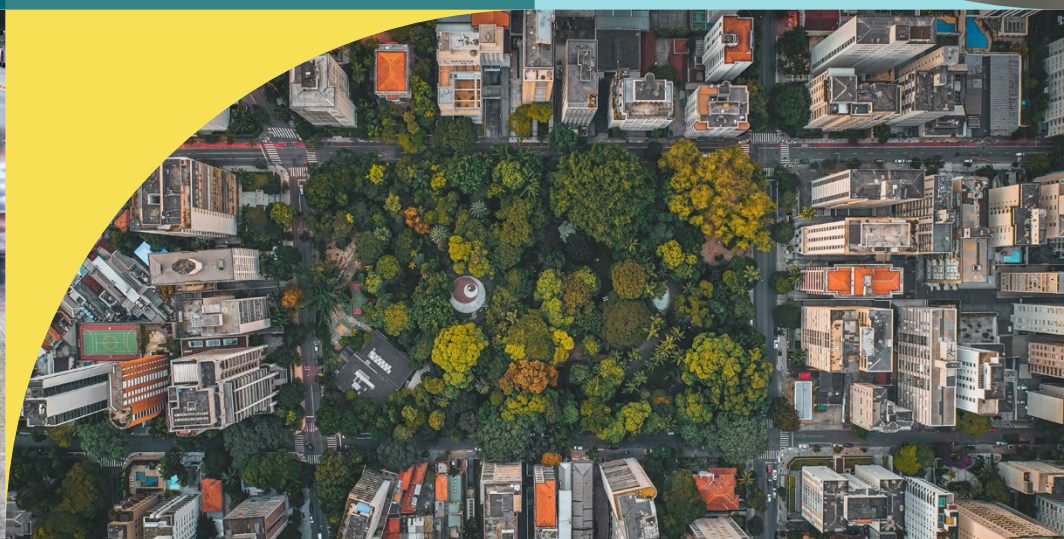
ICLEI
Local Governments
for Sustainability

Implementation guide for accelerated climate action

Opportunities for effective multilevel governance and action







IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE FOR ACCELERATED CLIMATE ACTION – OPPORTUNITIES FOR EFFECTIVE MULTILEVEL GOVERNANCE AND ACTION

This Guide is part of ICLEI's GreenClimateCities™ (GCC) Program, addressing approaches and opportunities to accelerate climate action through multilevel governance and action, as enablers. The Guide is globally relevant to all levels and tiers of government, as well as to all stakeholders working with government. It focuses on different approaches and mechanisms, as opportunities for coordination and collaboration. A range of examples are presented, as are globally relevant initiatives such as the Coalition for High Ambition Multilevel Partnerships (CHAMP) for Climate Action.

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ABOUT ICLEI – LOCAL GOVERNMENTS FOR SUSTAINABILITY

ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability is a global network working with more than 2,500 local and regional governments committed to sustainable urban development. Active in 125+ countries, ICLEI influences sustainability policy and drives local action for low emission, nature-based, equitable, resilient and circular development. ICLEI's Members and team of experts work together through peer exchange, partnerships and capacity building to create systemic change for urban sustainability.

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FOREWORD

Cities and local territories - people, place, and infrastructure - already face the impacts of climate change. The frequency and intensity of heatwaves, rainfall, and floods are growing realities, with rising economic costs and negative social impacts across communities. Many local and regional governments already engage to avoid and reduce greenhouse gas emissions in their territories, adapt to known and emerging climate impacts, and strengthen the resilience of their people, infrastructure, and institutions. Yet, implementation is lagging in responding to this global climate crisis. The reasons for this are manifold and include the lack of access to necessary finance.

Subnational governments cannot tackle climate change alone. Effective partnerships are key, and well-designed governance is essential to ensure effective impact. Multilevel governance as well as multilevel action require working across all levels of government, with all stakeholders, including citizens, non-governmental organizations, the private sector, and industry. It is only through well-coordinated collective action that we can address the causes and effects of climate change.

Multilevel governance and action are essential to accelerating positive impact, tracking progress, and forming that enabling framework to translate planning into action. A whole-of-society approach needs policies aligned with adequate and accessible finance, and well-coordinated implementation by all stakeholders. It must be guided by inclusive decision-making across all levels of government and society.

This Guide is part of ICLEI's global guidance to all actors, but specifically addressing governments at all levels, to accelerate local climate action. I invite you to explore the practical approaches, examples, and tools to help build effective multilevel governance and action for a more resilient, equitable, and climate-neutral future.

In my capacity as Mayor of Malmö and President of ICLEI, I have been advocating for countries around the world to join CHAMP – the Coalition for High Ambition Multilevel Partnerships for Climate Action. I am therefore particularly pleased that the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR), representing all municipalities and regions in Sweden, has successfully encouraged the Swedish government to endorse CHAMP.

This much-needed global initiative brings together national and subnational governments to strengthen collaboration and turn climate commitments into concrete action. It reflects our shared conviction that strong multilevel partnerships are essential to accelerating climate action at the scale and speed needed.

Today, my call to action is simple: Join forces to effectively tackle climate change. We need robust governance approaches that guide and drive our coordinated efforts. The solutions are within reach when we work together.



Katrin Stjernfeldt Jammeh

ICLEI President
Mayor, City of Malmö, Sweden

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Impactful climate action requires coordinated efforts across all levels of government and society, to progress from commitments to implementation, tracking results and re-aligning as needed. A diverse range of actions are required to ensure effective and positive impacts, in particular enabling policy and regulation, institutionalizing climate planning and action, implementing coherent climate action plans (CAPs), (re)development of infrastructure, and empowering stakeholders to act, to mention but a few key action areas. There is tremendous potential for accelerated climate action in cities, towns and subnational regions, guided by the territories' local and regional governments. Finance for all these actions is essential to deliver impactful and lasting results. We look to effective multilevel governance and action (MLG&A) as an essential enabler to bridge the delivery gap by connecting national ambition with local priorities, capacities, and implementation.

Growing international recognition of (the need for) multilevel cooperation - as reflected in the Paris Agreement, the Global Stocktake, and the Coalition for High Ambition Multilevel Partnerships (CHAMP) for Climate Action - creates opportunities to strengthen the role of local and regional governments in the development, implementation, and monitoring of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and National Adaptation Plans (NAPs), as well as National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plans (NBSAPs), among others.

Drawing on ICLEI's global experience over decades, this Guide presents the principles, enabling conditions, and six practical mechanisms for effective MLG&A: National–Local Dialogues, Town Hall COPs, permanent coordination platforms, joint planning processes, collaborative financing, and shared data and monitoring systems, among others. Country and sectoral examples illustrate achievements ranging from strengthened institutional cooperation and aligned climate plans to investment preparation, technical capacity development, and practical implementation.

Diverse examples also highlight persistent challenges. Dialogue does not automatically lead to implementation; project preparation does not guarantee financing; and recommendations do not necessarily translate into policy reform. The Guide is honest about limitations and achievements. Progress requires clearly assigned responsibilities, institutional continuity, adequate resources, and mechanisms to monitor outcomes and address implementation barriers.

The Guide offers practical pathways and recommendations for national and subnational governments, their development partners, and other stakeholders seeking to move from a purely consultative approach to shared responsibility, from planning to implementation, and progress from climate commitments to measurable positive results.

ABBREVIATIONS

BMZ	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CHAMP	Coalition for High Ambition Multilevel Partnerships
CAP	Climate Action Plan (also referred to among others as SEACAP - Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plan)
CDP-ICLEI Track	Global reporting platform for subnational governments on climate, energy and environmental issues
COP	Conference of the Parties
CRVA	Climate Risk and Vulnerability Assessment
EU	European Union
GCC	GreenClimateCities™ Program - ICLEI's global climate impact program
GCoM	Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GHG	Greenhouse gas
ICLEI	ICLEI - Local Governments for Sustainability
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
IPCC SR-CITIES	IPCC Special Report on Climate Change and Cities
ISUDA	Integrated Sustainable Urban Development Assessment
LGMA	Local Governments and Municipal Authorities Constituency (at the UNFCCC)
LRGs	Local and Regional Governments
LT-LEDS	Long-Term Low-Emission Development Strategy
MLA	Multilevel Action
MLG	Multilevel Governance
MRV	Monitoring, Reporting, and Verification
NAP	National Adaptation Plan
NBSAP	National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan
NDC	Nationally Determined Contribution
NLD	National–Local Dialogue
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UNCCD	United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
VLR	Voluntary Local Review
WRI	World Resources Institute

GLOSSARY

2030 Agenda: The 2030 Agenda recognizes local governments as indispensable actors for achieving sustainable development. Many SDG targets, including those related to sustainable cities (SDG 11), climate action (SDG 13), clean energy (SDG 7), water (SDG 6) and resilient infrastructure (SDG 9), depend upon effective coordination between national and subnational governments.

Collaborative financing: Financing arrangements through which different levels of government, financial institutions, and development partners coordinate resources, responsibilities, and investment priorities to support climate action.

Horizontal coordination: Horizontal coordination refers to collaboration among institutions, government departments, and policy sectors operating at the same level of governance. It seeks to overcome institutional fragmentation, policy silos, and overlapping responsibilities by facilitating cooperation and policy coherence across areas such as energy, transport, housing, biodiversity, and finance. Through structured coordination mechanisms, stakeholders can align their strategies, exchange knowledge, identify shared priorities, and develop integrated responses to climate and urban development challenges. Horizontal coordination complements vertical coordination by ensuring that institutions and sectors work collaboratively rather than pursuing disconnected or potentially conflicting objectives (ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability [ICLEI], 2025b, pp. 8, 12, 14).

Institutionalization: The integration of coordination arrangements, responsibilities, and processes into established governance structures, regulations, agreements, or administrative practices to support continuity beyond individual projects or political cycles.

Integrated climate action: Subnational governments are well placed to define coherent and inclusive plans that address integrated climate action - climate change adaptation, resilience and mitigation. Refer to ICLEI's Climate Neutrality Framework for more details (Arikan et al., 2020).

Joint planning: A collaborative process through which national, regional, and local governments align climate objectives, strategies, responsibilities, and implementation priorities while reflecting their respective mandates and territorial contexts.

Local and regional governments (LRGs): Subnational governments that administer and lead subnational territories, including cities, towns, provinces, states, and regions. The naming of these may differ from country to country, hence the terminology refers to local governments/municipalities, metropolitan authorities, and those with a wider territorial focus - all depending on national government structures and administrative arrangements.

Localization of climate action: The translation of international and national climate commitments into locally appropriate priorities, policies, investments, and implementation measures, informed by territorial needs and capacities.

Multilevel Governance and Action (MLG&A): The coordinated processes, institutional arrangements, and collaborative actions through which different levels of government, together with other relevant stakeholders, align climate policies, mobilize resources, share responsibilities, implement and monitor climate action - addressing whole-of-government and whole-of-society.

Multilevel governance (MLG): Governance arrangements by different levels or tiers of government, involving coordination, communication and exchange, official interaction mechanisms and processes, also addressing negotiation on roles and mandates, linked to associated budgets - conducted among institutions and actors operating at different territorial and administrative levels.

Shared data and monitoring: The use of common indicators, reporting frameworks, and information systems to exchange climate-related data, track implementation, and support accountability and evidence-based decision-making across government levels.

Vertical coordination: Vertical coordination refers to collaboration and alignment between different levels of government, particularly national, regional, and local authorities, to ensure that climate policies, priorities, resources, and implementation efforts are coherent and mutually reinforcing. It provides an institutional link between national climate ambitions and local realities, enabling national frameworks to support locally appropriate action while allowing local experience and implementation challenges to inform national decision-making. Mechanisms such as National–Local Dialogues facilitate this coordination by establishing shared priorities, clarifying responsibilities, identifying governance and financing barriers, and supporting joint planning and implementation (ICLEI, 2025b, pp. 12, 14).

1

Critical role of Multilevel Governance and Action

Climate change is a global complex, cross-sectoral, and multi-stakeholder challenge that must be tackled locally. No single institution, sector or level of government can deal with this alone. It requires effective planning and action through partnership, coordination and cooperation across a broad range of stakeholders and sectors, with a multi-disciplinary focus to enhance synergies and define win-win approaches.

A range of global commitments and frameworks already address climate action, in particular the Paris Agreement, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, among others. These global commitments are made by national governments, on behalf of their countries. To date, science and reports show that we are collectively not on track with these. Subnational governments are equally committed, for example by localizing the SDGs and exploring integrated climate action, i.e., by addressing climate resilience, adaptation and mitigation. Honoring these commitments means accelerated action and tracking impact over time, course-correcting as needed.

Considering the crucial need for partnerships in this context, well-coordinated planning and action, across all levels of government and with active engagement of the whole-of-society, we should explore how governance can enable action.

1.1 DEFINING MULTILEVEL GOVERNANCE AND ACTION

Multilevel governance (MLG) addresses governance arrangements by different levels or tiers of government, involving coordination, communication and exchange, official interaction mechanisms and processes, also addressing negotiation on roles and mandates, linked to associated budgets - conducted among institutions and actors operating at different territorial and administrative levels. It refers to negotiated, non-hierarchical exchanges between (government) institutions at the transnational, national, regional, and local levels (IPCC, 2022).

This is an enabler for multilevel action, regardless of theme or sector. To advance on climate governance across all levels of government, vertical coordination and integration between local and national policies, and horizontal coordination among institutions operating at the same level and stakeholders is required. This structure is essential for addressing climate change, which cuts across administrative boundaries and requires coherent action at multiple levels simultaneously (Corfee-Morlot et al., 2009; ICLEI, 2025c).

Unlike traditional top-down governance, MLG&A recognizes that climate action is inherently collaborative and iterative. National governments establish policy and regulatory frameworks, legislation and financing mechanisms, while subnational governments translate these and their own ambitions into locally appropriate action, considering innovation, mobilizing communities and providing regular feedback to further inform national policy updates, underpinned by science-informed decisions (GIZ, 2020). Climate governance therefore becomes a dynamic process of shared responsibility rather than a one-way flow of decision-making.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) identifies multilevel governance as one of the strongest enabling conditions for climate change mitigation and adaptation, highlighting that coherent institutions, collaborative governance arrangements and coordination across administrative levels significantly improve implementation outcomes (IPCC, 2022). Similarly, the Organisation for Economic Co-

operation and Development (OECD) emphasizes that multilevel governance strengthens policy coherence, improves public investment and increases institutional effectiveness when addressing complex societal challenges (OECD, 2022).

ICLEI and its partners build on these foundations by placing action at the center of governance. Governance alone does not reduce emissions or increase resilience. Rather, governance creates enabling conditions through which climate action can be effectively implemented, financed and sustained over time. Throughout more than three decades of supporting local and regional governments (LRGs) worldwide, ICLEI has demonstrated that successful climate governance depends on institutionalized collaboration, mutual accountability and trust, continuous learning and shared implementation between all levels of government.

This understanding underpins ICLEI's **concept of MLG&A** which includes practical mechanisms that enable governments to jointly deliver climate action around the globe. These include collaborative planning processes, National–Local Dialogues, joint financing approaches, integrated monitoring systems, and increasingly, innovative participatory mechanisms, such as Town Hall COPs (ICLEI, n.d.-f), which connect local implementation and community engagement with national climate endeavors. These approaches form part of ICLEI's GreenClimateCities™ Program, as recommended opportunities for accelerated climate action.

ICLEI's GreenClimateCities™ (GCC) Program

The GCC Program supports local and regional governments (LRGs) around the globe in strengthening climate and energy planning, translating ambitions into action, illustrating how local capacity and coordinated governance in advancing climate objectives enable informed decision-making. The GCC process methodology includes multilevel climate governance & action in its three phases - Analyze, Act, and Accelerate. The GCC offers a flexible framework for strengthening institutional capacities, fostering cross-sectoral collaboration, and integrating learning into successive cycles of climate planning and implementation - for more details refer to Chapter 4 on implementation approaches.

The growing international recognition of the importance of multilevel climate governance is reflected, among others, in the Coalition for High Ambition Multilevel Partnerships (CHAMP) for Climate Action, launched by the COP28 Presidency on 1 December 2023 during the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP28) in Dubai, United Arab Emirates (COP28 Presidency, 2023; ICLEI, 2023). CHAMP is endorsed by more than 75 countries. CHAMP helps countries deliver more ambitious climate action by supporting enhanced collaboration with subnational governments through multilevel partnerships (WRI, 2026b). This means stepping up institutionalized cooperation between national and subnational governments, also considering the climate policy cycle – from planning and implementation to monitoring and revision of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and National Adaptation Plans (NAPs). This Guide supports countries in operationalizing these commitments through practical governance mechanisms and proven approaches.

Ultimately, effective MLG&A means establishing governance systems capable of accelerating fair, inclusive and transformative climate action across territories.

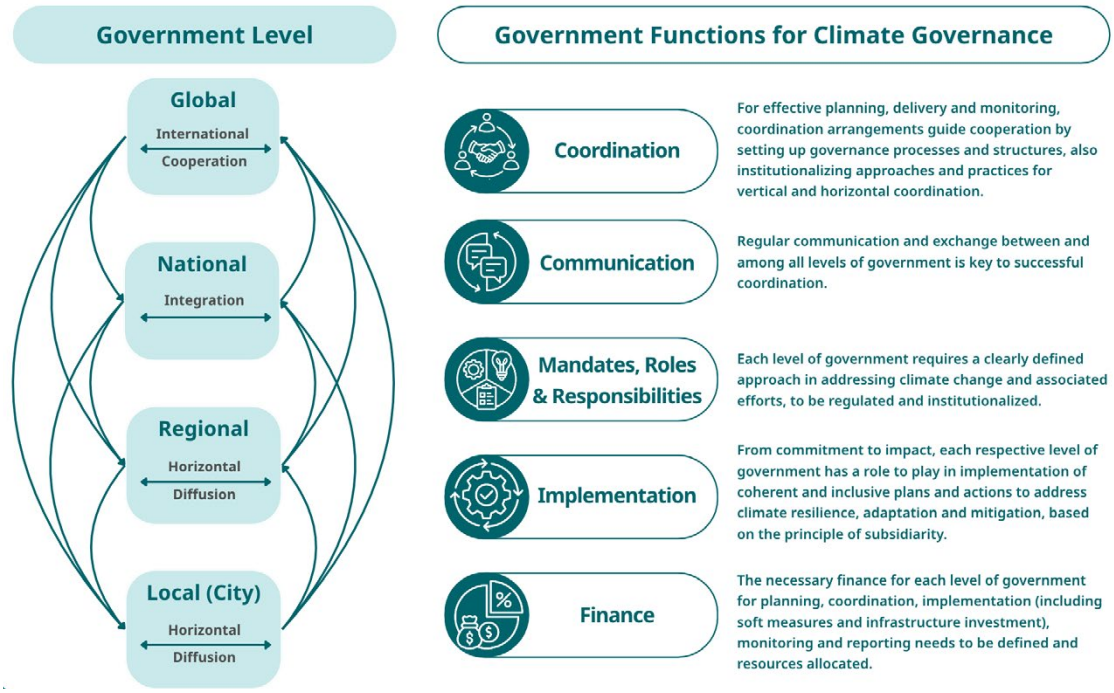


Figure 1.
Coordination for an effective multilevel governance to enable multilevel action.

Source: ICLEI, 2026. Self-generated infographic

1.2 GOVERNANCE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Anthropogenic greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions originate from multiple sectors and jurisdictions, while climate risks and vulnerabilities frequently transcend administrative boundaries. Decisions concerning energy, transport, housing, land use, water, waste, public health, disaster risk management and finance are often distributed across different line departments and levels of government (ICLEI, 2025c). Consequently, no single institution has the authority, resources or expertise required to deliver on climate objectives independently.

Impactful Climate Action requires Partnership

According to the IPCC Sixth Assessment Report (AR6), urban areas accounted for an estimated 67–72% of global CO_2 and CH_4 emissions in 2020, highlighting their critical importance for global climate mitigation. The IPCC further emphasizes that integrated urban mitigation strategies can deliver substantial emissions reductions, but their effectiveness depends on enabling regulatory and institutional frameworks, adequate resources, and cooperation among national and subnational governments (IPCC, 2022).

Building on the scientific foundations established by the IPCC AR6, the forthcoming IPCC Special Report on Climate Change and Cities (IPCC SR-CITIES) - as part of the Seventh Assessment Cycle and scheduled for publication in March 2027 - is expected to provide a dedicated assessment of urban climate risks, mitigation and adaptation options, and the enabling conditions for effective climate action. By addressing governance, institutional capacities, planning, finance, and the diversity of urban contexts, including practical experiences and case studies from cities across different regions, the report is expected to strengthen the scientific basis for informed decision-making by national, regional, and local governments. Its findings can help policymakers identify context-appropriate solutions, assess synergies and trade-offs, and strengthen the alignment between national climate policies and locally led planning, investment, and implementation (IPCC, 2024, 2026).

Fragmented governance could frequently lead to conflicting or misaligned policies, duplicated investments, inefficient use of public resources and delays in implementation (ICLEI Africa, 2021). Conversely, partnerships enable governments to pool expertise and capacities, align priorities, mobilize finance and accelerate delivery. This understanding forms the basis of initiatives such as CHAMP, which promotes institutionalized collaboration between national and subnational governments as a prerequisite for ambitious climate policy and to enable implementation.

Vertical and Horizontal Coordination

Governance can be ineffective due to unclear mandates, fragmented responsibilities and weak coordination between institutions at all levels of government. National priorities may not reflect local realities, while local priorities often fail to influence national decision-making. Further, line ministries and municipal departments frequently work in silos, leading to inconsistent policies, competing priorities and inefficient implementation (ICLEI, 2025c) - relevant to both horizontal (peer) and vertical coordination and cooperation.

Effective multilevel governance requires both vertical and horizontal coordination, addressing mandates, processes and mechanisms. Vertical coordination refers to collaboration across different levels of government, from national ministries to regional, metropolitan and local authorities. It ensures that climate priorities, finance, policy, and data are aligned while allowing local experience to continuously inform national decision-making (Corfee-Morlot et al., 2009).

A relevant example is the National–Local Dialogue, as a facilitated exchange between national and local governments to address complex issues. ICLEI facilitated these in several countries under the GEF-funded UrbanShift project (see examples throughout the Guide). Such exchanges demonstrate how structured dialogue can help to strengthen trust, create co-ownership, improve policy coherence and support climate ambition. National–Local Dialogues are not designed to be one-off consultations, instead as established recurring institutional processes they enable governments to co-create solutions and monitor progress together (ICLEI, 2025c).



The Second National-Local Dialogue, held in China in October 2024.

Source: ICLEI

Horizontal coordination refers to collaboration among institutions operating at the same governance level (Corfee-Morlot et al., 2009). This includes coordination across ministries, municipal departments, neighboring jurisdictions and non-governmental stakeholders. Since climate change cuts across every policy area, horizontal coordination is essential for integrating climate considerations into transport, energy, urban planning, finance, health, social inclusion and economic development.

Whole-of-Government Approach and why Bottom-Up Matters

Top-down models in which national governments set targets and delegate implementation to subnational authorities are insufficient for tackling climate change effectively. The subnational level, especially the local level, understands territorial realities, community priorities and implementation barriers well, being closer to people and place. They are the primary providers of public services, and the first responders to climate impacts - directly relevant to local climate resilience. As such, each level of government has (or should have) its own unique roles and responsibilities.

Institutionalized mechanisms that create regular feedback loops between all levels of government, and not exclusive in a top-down approach, are needed. National–Local Dialogues and Town Hall COPs exemplify this approach, by creating structured spaces where national and local priorities can be clarified, different experience shared, and stakeholder perspectives brought in before, during and after national and international climate negotiations. These mechanisms help to strengthen policy ownership, improve implementation and help translate global climate ambition into local action.

Local Leadership and Whole-of-Society Approach

Local governments are indispensable leaders of climate action. Through their mandate for urban planning, mobility, waste and water management and local infrastructure, they shape many of the decisions that determine emissions trajectories and climate resilience (ICLEI Africa, 2021).

Yet governments alone cannot achieve the systemic transformations required to overcome the challenge of our generation. The outcomes of the first Global Stocktake under the Paris Agreement reaffirm the need for a whole-of-society approach, recognizing the essential contributions of businesses, financial institutions, Indigenous Peoples, youth, academia, civil society organizations and local communities (UNFCCC, n.d.-b).

Every level of government has to engage in the role as convener rather than sole implementer, as this is a shared responsibility (Corfee-Morlot et al., 2009). MLG&A is most effective when it combines whole-of-government coordination with whole-of-society participation, ensuring that climate decisions are collaborative, equitable and grounded in local realities while contributing to national and global ambitions (LGMA, 2025a).

Rio Synergies - biodiversity, climate, and desertification

2026 is a Rio Conventions' "super year." UNCCD COP17 (Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia), CBD COP17 (Yerevan, Armenia) and UNFCCC COP31 (Antalya, Türkiye) have convened within months of one another. The respective outcomes can help strengthen coherence for territorial implementation addressing biodiversity, climate change and desertification. This requires effective multilevel governance and action to optimize collective and well-coordinated impact. Local and other subnational governments make daily decisions that simultaneously shape emissions, biodiversity, land use, infrastructure, public health, disaster risk, water security and economic development. This is the local reality of managing interconnected systems on a territorial scale. Coherence is therefore an implementation imperative, sharpened by tightening public budgets and rising demands on local institutions (ICLEI, 2026b).

1.3 GOVERNANCE FOR COORDINATED ACTION

Effective climate action depends on robust governance systems that enable coordination, accountability and collective implementation across institutions and levels of government. Integrated climate action (climate resilience, adaptation and mitigation) (ICLEI, 2020) requires decisions spanning multiple sectors and involving actors with different resources, priorities, and capacities. At the heart of MLG&A is the recognition that governance should serve as an enabler of climate implementation and establish the ripe conditions under which national ambition can be translated into local action (LGMA, 2025b).

Well-defined Mandates, Roles, and Responsibilities

One of the most common barriers to effective climate action is the absence of clearly defined institutional roles and responsibilities. Overlapping mandates, unclear divisions of responsibility or gaps in institutional ownership often result in policy incoherence and inefficient use of resources. In many countries, local governments are expected to implement climate action without the corresponding mandate, technical capacity or financial resources, while national institutions may lack mechanisms to incorporate local knowledge into planning and decision-making (ICLEI Africa, 2021).

Clearly defining mandates across governance levels helps ensure that each actor understands its role within the broader climate governance system. National governments are responsible for establishing legislative frameworks, setting national climate or climate-relevant targets through Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), National Adaptation Plans (NAPs), National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs), also long-term climate and energy strategies. They establish financing mechanisms and define reporting obligations. Regional governments often coordinate territorial planning, provide technical assistance and facilitate inter-municipal collaboration. Local governments translate national priorities into local action through urban planning, infrastructure investment, public service delivery and community engagement.

However, effective multilevel governance extends beyond assigning responsibilities. It also requires recognizing the complementary roles of different actors and creating institutional arrangements that encourage cooperation rather than isolated action. Mechanisms such as intergovernmental committees, National–Local Dialogues, joint planning processes and collaborative financing arrangements help transform individual mandates into shared responsibility for climate outcomes.

The interplay between different levels of government, including their respective roles, responsibilities, and opportunities for collaboration, is further illustrated in Table 1, expanding on ICLEI Europe's Multilevel Climate Governance infographic which highlights the importance of both vertical integration and horizontal cooperation (ICLEI Europe, n.d.).

Table 1. Typical Roles of Local and Regional Governments

Steering roles	Delivery roles	Connecting roles
Decision-Maker Set strategic direction, choose between policy options and decide on the way forward	**Implementer** Put into practice policies and measures	**Network Manager** Facilitate recurring exchange between actors, convening meetings and maintaining working relationships over time
Policy Designer Develop relevant instruments, plans, and regulations	**Service Provider** Deliver public services such as transport, water, waste and energy services	**Capacity Builder** Strengthen the skills, resources, and capabilities of smaller municipalities and local stakeholders
Innovator Pilot and showcase novel approaches locally, in a testing ground for solutions that could be scaled and replicated	**Finance Provider** Mobilize, allocate, and channel financial resources toward local delivery	**Knowledge Broker** Connect research and evidence to decision-making

Source: Kevin Ipekoglu, ICLEI, 2026, Solutions Gateway Solution, Strengthening Metropolitan Governance for Sustainable Urban Development

Coordinated Approach for Shared Outcomes

Coordination should continue throughout the entire climate policy, planning and implementation cycle – including monitoring, evaluation, reporting and course correction. Too often, ad hoc climate actions are implemented in isolation by different institutions using separate systems, timelines, and funding streams - making it difficult to assess collective progress or identify opportunities for improvement and breaking through silos.

A coordinated approach to implementation aligns priorities, investments and activities across sectors and levels of government while strengthening accountability for shared outcomes. Equally important is the establishment of integrated monitoring and evaluation systems that enable governments to track progress using common indicators, exchange data and regularly assess the effectiveness of policies and interventions, for example through CDP-ICLEI Track, a global reporting platform for subnational self-reporting (ICLEI, 2025c; ICLEI, 2026a; Salehi et al., 2026).

Shared monitoring strengthens transparency and responsibility, and can enhance trust between institutions (ICLEI, n.d.-a). When governments jointly review progress, identify implementation barriers and celebrate successes, they build stronger partnerships and increase collective ownership of climate commitments. This collaborative approach is particularly important for the implementation and revision of NDCs, NAPs and other national long-term climate-relevant strategies, where coordinated action across all levels of government is essential.

Ultimately, effective governance enables collective action and delivers measurable climate outcomes. Governance for coordination and action therefore creates the institutional foundations for ambitious and inclusive climate implementation ensuring that every level of government contributes according to its mandate while working toward shared national and global climate goals.

1.4 INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT AND FRAMING LOCALIZATION

Over the past decade, international policy frameworks have increasingly recognized that achieving global climate and sustainable development objectives depends on coordinated action across all levels of government. Local and other subnational governments are no longer viewed solely as implementers of national policy; they are increasingly recognized as strategic partners in designing, delivering and monitoring climate action (ICLEI, 2025a).

MLG&A provides the governance framework through which global commitments can be translated into locally relevant action while ensuring that local knowledge, innovation and implementation experience continuously inform national policy. This principle of localization has become central to international climate and biodiversity agendas and is reflected across multiple global agreements (LGMA, 2025a; Arikan, 2026).

- **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):** The 2030 Agenda recognizes local governments as indispensable actors for achieving sustainable development. Many SDG targets, including those related to sustainable cities (SDG 11), climate action (SDG 13), clean energy (SDG 7), water (SDG 6) and resilient infrastructure (SDG 9), depend upon effective coordination between national and subnational governments. Localizing SDGs is the term used in this context.
- **Paris Agreement:** The Paris Agreement establishes a common global framework for limiting warming and strengthening resilience while recognizing the important role of non-Party stakeholders, including subnational governments.
- **Global Stocktake:** The first Global Stocktake under the Paris Agreement concluded at COP28 in Dubai in December 2023, providing a comprehensive assessment of collective progress on climate mitigation, adaptation, and the means of implementation and support. Its outcome, adopted as Decision 1/CMA.5, confirmed that, despite progress, countries were not yet collectively on track to achieve the Paris Agreement's long-term goals, including efforts to limit global warming to 1.5°C (UNFCCC, 2023; UNFCCC, 2024), and further reinforced that achieving the goals of the Paris Agreement requires strengthened cooperation across all levels of government and increased engagement of non-state actors (COP28 Presidency, 2023).
- **Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs):** NDCs represent each country's primary climate commitments under the Paris Agreement. However, the implementation of many NDC measures, including urban mobility, buildings, waste, energy efficiency and nature-based solutions, depends largely on measures taken by LRGs (UN-Habitat, 2026).
- **National Adaptation Plans (NAPs):** Climate adaptation is inherently local territorial, considering flood risk, drought, heat stress, coastal erosion and ecosystem degradation, requiring locally tailored responses within a coherent national framework (UNFCCC, n.d.-a). NAPs therefore benefit from continuous collaboration between national and subnational governments through comprehensive climate risk and vulnerability assessments (CRVAs), planning, and implementation. Effective MLG&A enables adaptation priorities to reflect local realities while ensuring national support through finance, technical assistance and policy alignment.
- **National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs):** The Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework recognizes the importance of subnational governments in conserving biodiversity and restoring ecosystems. Since biodiversity, climate mitigation and climate adaptation are increasingly interconnected, stronger coordination between climate and biodiversity planning offers

opportunities for more integrated and cost-effective action (CBD, n.d.). Local governments play a central role in implementing nature-based solutions, restoring ecosystems and integrating biodiversity into urban development, making multilevel governance equally relevant for the implementation of National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans.

City WORKS – Translating global sustainability agendas into local action

Developed by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) through its BMZ-commissioned Sector Programme Cities, *City WORKS* is a practical toolkit designed to help local governments translate the SDGs and the New Urban Agenda into integrated local planning and implementation (GIZ, n.d.). The toolkit supports municipalities in assessing local challenges, identifying priorities, engaging stakeholders, and developing actionable measures aligned with international frameworks - through a structured, participatory approach.

It has also been used to illustrate opportunities for collaboration between international development agencies and city networks. Under the BMZ-funded Resilient Cities Action Package 2021 (ReCAP21), GIZ and ICLEI, alongside the Resilient Cities Network and Cities Alliance, worked together to support cities in planning green and resilient recovery measures (ICLEI, 2021), in response to the global pandemic but also addressing climate action. The City WORKS toolkit and ICLEI's GCC methodology were brought together, demonstrating how complementary planning tools and institutional partnerships can strengthen local capacities and help translate global sustainability objectives into locally relevant climate action.

The international frameworks and practical examples presented in this Chapter demonstrate the importance of connecting climate ambition with coordinated implementation across all levels of government. However, impactful MLG&A does not emerge automatically from shared commitments. It requires common principles, appropriate institutional capacities, supportive conditions, and an understanding of potential barriers. The following Chapter examines these foundations and how they can inform the design of effective governance arrangements.

2

Foundations of effective Multilevel Governance & Action

Effective MLG&A depends on four interconnected elements: guiding principles, governance dimensions, enabling conditions, and the ability to anticipate and manage risks. While closely related, these elements serve distinct purposes.

Guiding principles define how cooperation *should* be organized; governance dimensions identify the capacities and components required; enabling conditions establish the environment in which governance arrangements can function; and risks and challenges highlight factors that may undermine their effectiveness. Together, they provide a foundation for designing context-appropriate and resilient MLG&A arrangements.


Source: Unsplash

2.1 GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Based on ICLEI's decades of experience working with LRGs of all sizes and increasingly with national governments on enabling and supporting local climate action, the following guiding principles outline a foundation for designing effective, inclusive and ambitious MLG&A arrangements.

Subsidiarity, Responsibility and Responsiveness

Climate decisions should be taken at the most appropriate level of government, while ensuring sufficient coordination across governance levels. This principle, commonly referred to as *subsidiarity*, recognizes that responsibilities should rest with the institutions best placed to deliver effective outcomes (ICLEI Oceania, 2025b). Each level of government needs a clearly defined mandate, roles and responsibilities to ensure clarity on aligned approaches, without duplication and competition.

National governments play an essential role in establishing the necessary enabling conditions – i.e. national strategy, legislation and financing mechanisms. At the same time, LRGs possess detailed knowledge of local conditions, community priorities and implementation opportunities and challenges (ICLEI Africa, 2021). Assigning responsibilities according to comparative strengths improves efficiency, increases policy responsiveness and enables more context-specific solutions.

Subsidiarity does not imply decentralization without coordination. Rather, it requires a balanced governance system in which responsibilities are clearly allocated, supported by adequate resources and embedded within coherent national frameworks.

Responsiveness complements subsidiarity by ensuring that climate governance arrangements remain agile and adaptable to the evolving needs, priorities, emerging risks, and capacities of different territories and communities. Effective MLG&A should therefore provide mechanisms for continuous dialogue, stakeholder feedback, and the integration of local knowledge into planning, implementation, and policy adjustment. This enables national climate frameworks to respond to diverse local circumstances while allowing LRGs to adapt their actions to emerging challenges and opportunities. Responsiveness also requires that feedback informs decisions and that governance arrangements can adjust as conditions change, rather than relying solely on one-off consultations (ICLEI Africa, 2025; ICLEI Oceania, 2025b).

Accountability and Transparency

Effective MLG&A depends upon trust between institutions and stakeholders. This trust is strengthened when roles, responsibilities and decision-making processes are transparent and when governments are accountable for delivering agreed commitments.

Accountability extends beyond individual institutions. Within MLG&A, governments increasingly share responsibility for climate outcomes through collaborative planning, implementation and reporting. Transparent governance arrangements, including publicly available data and common monitoring frameworks, strengthen confidence between national and subnational governments while improving public legitimacy (ICLEI Oceania, 2025b).

Evidence-based decision-making also supports good governance by identifying implementation barriers and continuously improving climate policies.

Effectiveness and Efficient Use of Resources

Climate action requires significant financial, technical and human resources. Fragmented governance often results in duplicated investments, overlapping programs and inefficient allocation of limited capacities. Effective MLG&A therefore seeks to maximize collective impact through coordinated planning and complementary institutional roles (GCoM & WRI, 2023).

Aligning climate priorities across sectors and governance levels enables governments to leverage existing capacities, identify capacity and other gaps that need to be addressed for effective action, mobilize finance and avoid conflicting interventions. Integrated planning also generates co-benefits by simultaneously advancing climate mitigation, adaptation, biodiversity conservation and sustainable development objectives. The above mentioned principles also speak to an approach that optimizes the use of limited public resources.

Commitment to Sustained Coordination and Collective Action

Effective MLG&A provides institutional mechanisms through which collaboration occurs consistently. Formal coordination mechanisms, such as National–Local Dialogues, Town Hall COPs, intergovernmental committees, or metropolitan governance platforms, create opportunities for governments to jointly identify priorities, exchange knowledge and monitor implementation over time. Regardless of their format, successful mechanisms are characterized by *regular* engagement, clearly defined objectives, inclusive participation and shared ownership of outcomes. Institutionalizing coordination reduces dependence on individual politicians and helps ensure continuity throughout administrative changes.

Equity and Inclusiveness

Climate change disproportionately affects vulnerable populations, such as women, children, indigenous communities, and people with disabilities, while the capacity to respond varies significantly across territories and communities. Effective governance therefore requires decision-making processes that actively promote equity, inclusion and meaningful participation.

MLG&A should create opportunities for diverse stakeholders to contribute their knowledge, co-design their solutions, and directly participate in implementation. Inclusive governance strengthens the legitimacy of climate policies, improves social acceptance and increases the likelihood of successful implementation. Equity and justice should be integrated throughout climate planning, implementation, and monitoring. A people-centered approach also requires recognizing the different needs and circumstances of communities, addressing potential trade-offs, and ensuring that the benefits and burdens of climate action are distributed fairly (ICLEI, 2026c).

Research on urban informality highlights why equitable climate action must recognize informal settlements, livelihoods, and community-led adaptation as integral to urban climate governance. Without meaningful participation and shared decision-making, adaptation interventions can reinforce existing inequalities, including through displacement or shifting burdens onto vulnerable residents. Effective MLG&A should therefore recognize informal systems and institutionalize the co-production of solutions that connect community knowledge with resources and authority across government levels (Corbett et al., 2026).

Equity also applies across governance levels. LRGs should have meaningful opportunities to participate in decision-making and equitable access to the financial resources, technical assistance, and institutional support needed to fulfill their responsibilities and implement climate action.



Source: Bürgerverein Vilich-Müldorf e.V.

Institutionalization and Continuity

Achieving climate neutrality, including building climate resilience, requires governance systems capable of sustaining collaboration over multiple decades.

Institutionalizing MLG&A through legislation, formal agreements, recurring coordination platforms and long-term partnerships strengthens continuity and reduces the risk that climate initiatives are discontinued following political or administrative change (ICLEI Africa, 2021).

Long-term governance arrangements also foster institutional learning. Regular monitoring, evaluation and knowledge exchange enable governments to refine policies, respond to emerging challenges and continuously strengthen implementation. In this way, multilevel governance evolves as a dynamic system that adapts alongside changing climate risks, scientific evidence and societal priorities.

2.2 GOVERNANCE DIMENSIONS

Effective MLG&A requires political commitment, adequate financing, technical capacity, and robust data, among others. These dimensions are closely interconnected and interdependent. Deeply understanding these governance dimensions helps governments identify strengths and gaps and prioritize interventions that strengthen long-term climate action (ICLEI, 2025c). A brief outline below addresses key elements under each dimension.

Political Dimension

Political leadership provides the strategic direction and commitment necessary to drive climate action across all levels of government. Strong political ownership helps establish long-term climate objectives, mobilize resources and maintain priorities across administrative changes (ICLEI Africa, 2021). Planning and action that is based on the principle of subsidiarity - the most appropriate level of government to engage - can ensure MLG&A is effective, based on allocated responsibilities, without duplication or wasting resources, and ensuring well-aligned coordination.

Political commitment also influences the quality of collaboration between national and subnational governments. High-level political support can create an enabling environment for institutional cooperation, while weak or inconsistent leadership often results in fragmented implementation (ICLEI, 2025c). Ideally, tackling the climate challenge is an agreed shared priority by all, to then consistently deliver positive impactful action.

However, political commitment alone cannot guarantee continuity. Sustaining climate action requires moving beyond reliance on *individual* political champions toward institutionalized commitments that can withstand political transitions. This includes embedding climate objectives in legislation, long-term development strategies, dedicated budgets, and permanent coordination mechanisms, while fostering broad political and societal ownership. Importantly, institutionalization should not lead to rigidity: governance arrangements must remain pliable and responsive to ever-changing circumstances and democratic priorities. The challenge is not to eliminate political change, but to ensure that climate action does not depend on political continuity alone.

Institutional and Social Dimension

Institutions provide the structures through which governance operates. Clear mandates, well-defined responsibilities, and transparent decision-making processes enable governments to collaborate effectively.

Equally important are the social relationships that underpin governance (ICLEI, 2025c). Trust, collaboration, meaningful stakeholder participation and inclusive decision-making strengthen institutional legitimacy and encourage long-term partnerships (ICLEI Africa, 2021). Effective governance therefore depends not only on formal institutions, but also on the quality of relationships between different levels of governments, their local communities, the civil society and other important stakeholders.

Economic Dimension

Delivering the necessary ambitious climate action requires MLG&A capable of enabling mechanisms and mobilizing the necessary financial resources across sectors and all levels of government, for efficient and accelerated delivery. The economic dimension encompasses public and private finance, investment planning and coordination, with processes and mechanisms that also leverage private and innovative investment (ICLEI, 2024b; ICLEI, 2019). This requires a coherent approach, also to provide trust for much-needed private sector investment.

Aligning financial resources with climate priorities enables governments to move beyond isolated projects toward systemic transformation. Coordinated climate budgeting, climate-sensitive public investment, fiscal transfers that are tracked, and innovative financing mechanisms strengthen implementation while improving efficiency and accountability (ICLEI, 2019).

Technical Dimension

Technical capacity enables governments to effectively design and implement appropriate climate interventions. This includes expertise in translating climate science into decision-making guidance, GHG emissions accounting and reporting, resilience building and adaptation planning, supported by structured approaches such as ISO 14092 for local climate adaptation planning (Latinos, 2026). For local governments this should all be embedded within their wider urban planning mandate and process and also requires a variety of sectoral skills and understanding, also addressing nexus approaches. This is essential, for example in upgrading or designing new climate-resilient infrastructure and embedding nature-based solutions, through a strong technical project implementation team.

As climate challenges become increasingly complex, technical knowledge must be absorbed fast, integrated, and disbursed across sectors and governance levels (for example new knowledge in AI systems, digitalization and automation). Collaborative technical working groups, peer learning and knowledge exchange help ensure that expertise is shared and becomes an institutional good.

Data and Knowledge Dimension

Data and evidence-based decision-making are fundamental to effective MLG&A. Governments require reliable, accessible, and easily digestible data and information to properly evaluate climate risks and vulnerabilities, establish baselines, monitor progress and estimate intervention effectiveness (ICLEI, n.d.-d).

Shared data systems strengthen transparency and accountability while enabling coordinated planning across institutions. Global reporting platforms such as CDP-ICLEI Track illustrate how standardized reporting can support benchmarking, facilitate peer learning and provide evidence for national climate reporting and

inform investment decisions. Beyond quantitative data, governance is also addressed here. It is important to further recognize the value of local and Indigenous knowledge in critically examining underlying assumptions and shaping contextually appropriate and effective climate action (Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy et al., 2024).

Capacity and Resources Dimension

While technical expertise is important, human capacity is also critical for effective MLG&A. It includes a wide diversity of skill sets needed, including leadership, management (also financial), communication, and stakeholder engagement skills - to mention but a few. Capacity development should be viewed as a priority, and a continuous, iterative process. Long-term investment in institutional learning, peer exchange and professional development enables governments - ideally through in-house capacity - to adapt to evolving climate challenges and approaches to strengthening governance systems for effective delivery in the long run.

Cross-cutting Dimensions

Other cross-cutting dimensions may also influence governance effectiveness depending on national and local contexts. These include digital transformation, innovation, communication, cultural factors, gender equality and social inclusion. Increasingly, governance also requires the ability to manage uncertainty through adaptive management approaches that enable institutions to learn from implementation and adjust policies over time.

These dimensions help identify the capacities and functions that effective governance systems require. Their presence alone, however, does not guarantee successful implementation. The enabling conditions discussed in the following section determine whether these capacities can be mobilized and sustained in practice.

2.3 ENABLING CONDITIONS

While governance dimensions describe the components of an effective MLG&A, enabling conditions create the environment in which these components can function successfully. Without supportive legal, institutional and financial conditions, even well-designed governance mechanisms may struggle to achieve lasting climate outcomes.

Legal and Regulatory Frameworks

Clear legal and regulatory frameworks establish the authority, responsibilities and accountability necessary for coordinated climate action. National legislation can define institutional mandates, formalize coordination mechanisms and provide the legal basis for local climate planning, reporting and implementation. Legislation also strengthens continuity by embedding MLG&A within permanent institutional structures.

Fiscal Coordination

Effective MLG&A depends on aligning financial resources with institutional responsibilities. Local governments frequently carry significant implementation responsibilities while lacking sufficient financial autonomy or predictable funding streams Kaur et al. (2023).

Fiscal coordination, including intergovernmental transfers, shared investment planning and climate-responsive budgeting, helps ensure that responsibilities are matched by adequate resources and enables governments to jointly deliver national climate targets (e.g. NDCs).

From EU Requirements to National Action: Mandating Multilevel Governance and Planning

In the European Union, Article 11 of Regulation (EU) 2018/1999 on the Governance of the Energy Union and Climate Action requires each Member State to establish a multilevel climate and energy dialogue through which local authorities and other stakeholders can discuss policy scenarios and review progress on energy and climate policies (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2018).

National legislation can go further by mandating local planning. In France, intermunicipal authorities with more than 20,000 inhabitants are generally required to adopt territorial climate-air-energy plans (*Plans climat-air-énergie territoriaux*, PCAETs) (French Ministry for Ecological Transition, n.d.). In Germany, the Heat Planning Act (*Wärmeplanungsgesetz*), which entered into force in 2024, requires the federal states to ensure that heat plans are prepared for their municipalities, with deadlines staggered according to population size (Federal Republic of Germany, 2023).

Such mandates are most effective when accompanied by adequate funding, technical capacity, and mechanisms to ensure meaningful implementation rather than procedural compliance alone.

Stable Institutions

Climate transitions require governance systems that remain effective over decades. Stable institutions with clearly defined mandates, established coordination mechanisms and professional administrative capacity provide continuity and are among the most important enabling factors for MLG&A (Salehi et al., 2026).

Institutional stability also encourages long-term partnerships, strengthens investor confidence and enables governments to build institutional memory through continuous learning. Institutional stability, however, is not a given. It needs to be deliberately built and carefully nurtured. Similarly to the necessary political commitment prerequisites above, institutional stability requires embedding climate action within formal legal and administrative frameworks (ICLEI, 2025c).

Capacity and Competence

Governance mechanisms are only as effective as the people and institutions responsible for implementing them. Adequate technical expertise and financial management skills, for example, are essential enabling conditions for MLG&A.

Investing in capacity development across all levels of government strengthens implementation, improves coordination and enables institutions to respond effectively to emerging climate challenges (ICLEI, 2025c).

Other Enabling Conditions

Additional enabling conditions may include public participation, digitalization, access to climate finance, knowledge-sharing networks and strong partnerships with academia, civil society and the private/insurance sector. Together, these factors create a fertile environment that supports innovation and continuous improvement.

2.4 RISKS AND CHALLENGES

Even well-designed MLG&A systems face risks that can undermine success. Recognizing these challenges enables governments to anticipate barriers and strengthen the resilience of governance arrangements.

Political instability and conflict

Frequent political change, institutional restructuring, and civil unrest can disrupt governance, weaken coordination mechanisms and delay implementation of climate policies. Political instability often shifts priorities away from long-term climate objectives toward immediate crises, making institutional continuity particularly important (ICLEI, 2025c).

Trust in government

Trust is one of the most important foundations of effective MLG&A. Limited trust between national and local governments, also between government and society can reduce stakeholder participation, co-ownership and longevity of interventions. It can undermine implementation altogether. Ultimately, it is a crucial aspect that will make the difference between success and failure of any government intervention. Building trust requires transparent decision-making, regular dialogue, shared accountability and meaningful participation of stakeholders throughout the entire planning, implementation and monitoring process (ICLEI Africa, 2021).

Geopolitical considerations

Climate governance increasingly operates within a rapidly changing geopolitical landscape. Global economic uncertainty, international conflicts, shifting political priorities and disruptions to supply chains can influence resilience, access to finance, technology and international cooperation. Strengthening domestic governance systems and diversifying partnerships enhances resilience against external shocks while maintaining progress toward climate objectives (Kaur et al., 2023).



Source: Pixabay

Financial Constraints

Insufficient or unpredictable financial resources remain one of the greatest barriers to implementing climate action (ICLEI Africa, 2021). Limited access to finance, competing priorities and legal constraints for LRGs delay investments and lead to stagnating programs. Climate ambition needs proper finance flowing for planning and implementation. MLG&A mechanisms need to address financial challenges by improving coordination, leveraging multiple financing sources, and aligning investments with shared climate priorities.

The effectiveness of MLG&A depends not only on the presence of enabling conditions and frameworks, but also on the ability to anticipate and address governance risks. The table below summarizes the principal enabling conditions and the challenges that may arise when these are absent, insufficiently developed, or poorly coordinated.

Note: These conditions could be mutually reinforcing: weaknesses in one area, such as insufficient financing or limited institutional capacity, can undermine progress in others, even where political commitment and formal coordination mechanisms are in place.

Table 2. Enabling conditions, associated risks, and mitigation measures for effective MLG&A

Enabling condition	Risks when absent or insufficient	Measures to mitigate risks
Sustained political commitment	Shifting priorities, short-term decision-making, and discontinuity following political transitions.	Embed climate commitments in legislation, long-term strategies, and cross-party agreements to sustain action beyond electoral cycles.
Stable and adaptive institutions	Fragmented mandates, loss of institutional memory, and coordination mechanisms dependent on individual champions or projects.	Formalize institutional responsibilities, secure dedicated staffing and resources, and establish mechanisms for continuity and institutional learning.
Clear roles and responsibilities	Overlapping mandates, accountability gaps, duplication of efforts, and unresolved tensions between governance levels.	Define responsibilities through formal agreements, clarify decision-making authority, and establish transparent accountability mechanisms.
Adequate and predictable financing	Unfunded mandates, uneven implementation capacity, and dependence on short-term external funding.	Establish predictable intergovernmental fiscal transfers, dedicated climate budgets, and accessible financing mechanisms for LRGs.
Technical and human capacities	Limited ability to plan, coordinate, mobilize resources, and implement or monitor climate action.	Invest in continuous capacity development, peer learning, technical assistance, and professional development across government levels.
Inclusive participation and trust	Exclusion of climate vulnerable groups, weak legitimacy, limited local ownership, and resistance to implementation.	Institutionalize inclusive participation, ensure representation of marginalized groups, and establish mechanisms to incorporate stakeholder feedback.

Enabling condition	Risks when absent or insufficient	Measures to mitigate risks
Accessible data and knowledge-sharing	Misaligned priorities, weak evidence-based decision-making, duplication of efforts, and difficulties tracking progress.	Develop interoperable data systems, harmonized indicators, and regular information-sharing and joint monitoring arrangements.
Institutionalized coordination and dialogue	Ad hoc cooperation, siloed policies, inconsistent planning cycles, and limited alignment between national and local climate objectives.	Establish permanent multilevel coordination platforms with clear mandates, regular dialogue, and shared planning and review processes.

Source: Informed by ICLEI (2025c), Salehi et al. (2026), and Corfee-Morlot et al. (2009).

Taken together, these principles, dimensions, enabling conditions, and risks provide a framework for assessing the readiness of governance systems and identifying opportunities for improvement. Their practical value lies in informing the selection and design of coordination mechanisms suited to different institutional and territorial contexts. Chapter 3 explores how these foundations can be translated into concrete arrangements for joint planning, decision-making, financing, and implementation.

3

Recommended delivery mechanisms and opportunities for accelerated action

The foundations outlined in Chapter 2 provide a basis for translating multilevel governance principles into practical arrangements for coordinated climate action. While governance systems differ according to national legislation, institutional structures, political contexts, and available capacities, common approaches can help governments strengthen cooperation and move from commitments toward implementation.

Drawing on ICLEI's experience working with governments and partners across regions, this Chapter presents six complementary delivery mechanisms that can be adapted to different contexts. It then provides recommendations for key stakeholders on how to establish, support, and sustain these arrangements. Rather than prescribing a single governance model, the Chapter identifies practical opportunities to strengthen shared responsibility, institutional coordination, and implementation.

3.1 MECHANISMS FOR COORDINATED CLIMATE ACTION

Examples of institutional mechanisms that enable governments to collaborate throughout the climate policy, planning and implementation cycle are outlined below. A common thread is that these are established around tangible cooperation needs and opportunities. These mechanisms create structured opportunities for coordination, joint decision-making, knowledge exchange and continuous learning, stakeholder engagement, financing, and monitoring. While no single mechanism is sufficient on its own, together they form a governance ecosystem capable of accelerating climate ambition through coordinated implementation.

Over 30 years, ICLEI has supported LRGs worldwide in designing, facilitating, and strengthening their institutional mechanisms through initiatives such as the GreenClimateCities™ (GCC) Program, CDP-ICLEI Track, the annual Daring Cities Forums, Town Hall COPs, flagship projects such as UrbanShift, as well as initiatives such as CHAMP and the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy (GCoM). By managing a variety of national and regional climate programs, ICLEI ensured direct participation in country mechanisms for MLG&A. Although governance arrangements vary across countries, the following mechanisms have consistently proven effective in strengthening collaboration, institutional ownership, and climate implementation.

National–Local Dialogues - A Process for Co-Delivery and Co-Ownership

Beyond consultation, LRGs can provide substantial value beyond just validating and aligning to national policies. Local knowledge and information of territorial conditions, infrastructure, communities, implementation barriers, and investment requirements should inform national approaches from the outset.

Creating a space of trust for frank and fruitful discussions (closed-door, as needed), where each level of government can speak up and is respectfully listened to, aimed at finding solutions and approaches, is essential. By institutionalizing National–Local Dialogues (NLDs), which go beyond exchange and consultation, into co-design and co-delivery, these mechanisms can be used to unpack concerns, barriers and options for action that require a multilevel response.

These are recurring forums where senior representatives from national Ministries, regional and local governments, and other relevant government authorities come together to jointly discuss, plan and agree on a way forward. Unlike one-off consultations, these dialogues establish long-term institutional relationships needed to support continuous collaboration and deliver results. As needed, they can also include representatives from civil society, academia, development partners, and the private sector, to discuss relevant matters.

A typical dialogue brings together stakeholders around shared objectives, e.g. to review national policy priorities, identify implementation barriers and co-design solutions or joint recommendations, and collectively agree on joint follow-up actions. Outputs could include the definition and reporting on progress of co-owned roadmaps, recommendations for strengthening national strategies and plans, enhancing institutional coordination, and identifying investment priorities. This is relevant to policy and implementation, for example implementation and investment plans of NDCs, NAPs, NBSAPs, and Long-Term Low-Emission Development Strategies (LT-LEDS).

National–Local Dialogues – Building Trust and Sustaining Cooperation

ICLEI has developed and refined a methodology for organizing and facilitating effective National–Local Dialogues (NLDs), which was further tested and applied through the GEF-funded UrbanShift program (2021–2025). This process resulted in the co-development of eight national–local coordination roadmaps, which contributed to in-country MLG&A processes.

A key lesson from UrbanShift experiences is that a successful dialogue require careful preparation, a clear agenda and purpose, relevant stakeholder representation at the relevant level of seniority, and clearly defined follow-up actions. Beyond the dialogues themselves, their greatest value lies in further building trust and establishing lasting institutional relationships between different levels of government, while discussing priority issues. The resulting roadmaps provide a framework for continued collaboration, shared ownership, and coordinated action beyond individual dialogue events (ICLEI, 2025c).



The First National-Local Dialogue, held in Argentina in December 2022.

Source: ICLEI

While the dialogues may generate joint recommendations and strengthen institutional relationships, their longer-term impact depends on whether participating governments establish follow-up procedures, define responsibilities and translate agreed priorities into financed actions.

India: From National–Local Dialogues to continuous multilevel cooperation

Under UrbanShift, ICLEI, in collaboration with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA) and the National Institute of Urban Affairs (NIUA), facilitated two National–Local Dialogues (NLDs) in New Delhi, respectively in May 2023 and October 2025. These brought together representatives of national institutions, municipal governments, implementing agencies, and development partners (ICLEI, 2025c).

India illustrates how NLDs, supported by a Multilevel Governance Roadmap, can evolve from individual consultations into a continuous process of coordination, learning, and adaptation.

The first dialogue focused on sustainable and smart infrastructure, exploring how national urban development programs could better respond to local priorities and address governance fragmentation, financing constraints, and capacity gaps. Building on these discussions, the second dialogue revisited priorities in light of evolving urban challenges, shifting attention toward innovation, integrated transit-oriented development, low-carbon mobility, and inclusive, gender-responsive planning.



The Second National-Local Dialogue, held in India in October 2025.

Source: ICLEI

Central to the UrbanShift approach is the *Multilevel Governance Roadmap*, designed to translate dialogue outcomes into agreed actions, institutional responsibilities, timelines, and opportunities for follow-up. Rather than treating the initial dialogue as a one-off consultation, the Roadmap provides a framework for maintaining cooperation, reviewing progress, and adjusting priorities as new challenges and opportunities emerge.

India's experience demonstrates the value of MLG&A as an evolving process rather than a fixed agreement. Successive dialogues allow national and local governments to build on previous discussions, respond to changing realities, and progressively strengthen the alignment between national policies and locally identified needs. Combined with a living Roadmap, this approach provides a pathway toward impactful climate collaboration and implementation.

Town Hall COPs - Local to National to Local

Inspired by the UN Climate Change Conferences (UN Climate Change Conferences - COPs), Town Hall COPs were established to create locally grounded spaces where communities, local governments, national representatives, youth, and civil society can identify climate priorities and co-create solutions, while connecting these discussions to national and international climate processes. This is also linked to international climate negotiations where the important roles of subnational governments and other "non-state actors", and resulting growing demand for mechanisms that support MLG&A. Town Hall COPs represent one such innovation (LGMA, 2025a).

Developed by ICLEI, Town Hall COPs create structured national dialogue processes before, during, and after each UN Climate Change Conference (COP) (ICLEI, n.d.-f). They provide an institutional platform where national governments, LRGs and other important stakeholders, such as civil society, academia and the private sector can engage and collectively discuss national and local climate priorities, also contributing to national positions within the UNFCCC process.

ICLEI's Town Hall COP model is deliberately designed to be community-led, nationally relevant, and transformation-oriented, with outcomes that can inform national climate plans and be elevated through ICLEI's role as focal point of the LGMA Constituency. These are conceptualized as recurring governance mechanisms. Typically hosted by a subnational government, prior to each COP, they provide opportunities to identify implementation challenges, develop shared recommendations, and strengthen coordination around delivery on climate action. The aim is also to ensure that local perspectives remain visible throughout negotiations. Following the COP, they provide a platform to communicate outcomes, identify implications for national policy, and coordinate implementation of new international commitments.

Town Hall COPs are ideal mechanisms for use in CHAMP, to support operationalising its principles, by strengthening collaboration between national and subnational governments. This in turn also feeds into the work of the Local Governments and Municipal Authorities (LGMA) Constituency under the UNFCCC, sharing examples and informing recommendations.

The immediate achievement lies in creating opportunities for local perspectives to inform national climate discussions. Long-term impact will depend on how systematically these inputs are reflected and absorbed in national decisions.

CASE STUDY | Town Hall COPs in Sub-Saharan Africa

In 2025, ICLEI Africa supported 18 Town Hall COPs across six Sub-Saharan African countries (Kenya, Namibia, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, and Uganda), collectively engaging more than 2,000 participants (ICLEI Africa, 2025). National government representatives participated in 60% of the events, enabling direct exchange between community leaders and national policymakers. The outcomes are designed to inform the NDC and NAP implementation and tracking and, through ICLEI's role as focal point of the LGMA Constituency, connect local perspectives to the UNFCCC process.

South Africa provides a particularly strong example of how this model can move from local dialogue toward institutionalized multilevel climate governance. The national Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE) formally endorsed the Town Hall COP model. Nine Town Hall COPs were subsequently convened in partnership between the South African Local Government Association (SALGA) and ICLEI Africa. This created a direct pathway between the national and local governments for NDC implementation and feedback. The process also generated more durable coordination mechanisms: for example, the Tshwane Climate Action Forum was launched as a permanent platform (see section 3.1.3 below) intended to sustain multilevel collaboration beyond the annual COP cycle (ICLEI Africa, 2025). South Africa's experience demonstrates how national determination, local ownership, and structured participation can work together to connect community priorities with national climate implementation.



Town Hall COP held in Tswelopele, South Africa.

Source: ICLEI Africa



Participants of the Town Hall COP held in Tshwane, South Africa.

Source: ICLEI Africa

Permanent Multilevel Coordination Platforms

With dialogues creating momentum and political buy-in, long-term MLG&A benefits from *permanent* institutional coordination mechanisms. These platforms provide stable structures through which governments coordinate policies, align investments, monitor implementation, report on progress, and resolve institutional challenges on a continuous basis (ICLEI Europe, 2025).

Permanent coordination platforms (see the case studies below) take different forms depending on the national governance system (WRI & GCoM, 2023). These may include climate councils, intergovernmental committees, metropolitan governance bodies, sector-specific coordination, and/or formal coordination units embedded within relevant line ministries. Regardless of institutional design, their common purpose is to facilitate regular collaboration and coordination

European Initiatives for Multilevel Climate Cooperation

The Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy – Europe has worked for more than fifteen years through a network of regional and national Covenant Coordinators which support municipalities—particularly smaller ones—in climate and energy planning, implementation, and reporting (EU Covenant of Mayors, 2025).

More recently, cities participating in the EU Mission for 100 Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities have been developing Climate City Contracts as collaborative frameworks that bring together commitments and actions from local governments and a broad range of stakeholders, including regional and national authorities, businesses, and civil society organizations (European Commission, 2025). These initiatives illustrate how structured cooperation can strengthen institutional coordination and translate shared climate ambitions into concrete local action.

Establishing a coordination platform is an institutional achievement, but its effectiveness ultimately depends on regular and well-facilitated participation, co-design and decision-making authority, adequate and reliable resourcing, with consistent and transparent follow-through.

ICLEI has consistently observed that countries with permanent coordination mechanisms are better positioned to maintain policy continuity across political cycles, strengthen institutional learning, and integrate climate action into broader development planning. Yet, an enabling governance architecture does not in itself guarantee delivery. Translating multilevel commitments into implementation still depends on effective coordination, political stability, adequate local capacity, and accessible and predictable finance.

CASE STUDY | Brazil's "climate federalism"

Brazil provides an important example of institutionalized MLG&A. Collaboration between the federal government, states, municipalities, and municipal networks has evolved through multiple coordination platforms that support climate planning, implementation, and policy exchange. ICLEI Brazil has contributed to strengthening these governance arrangements through in-depth, tailored, as well as individualized support of subnational governments.

Brazil's approach to "climate federalism" recognizes states and cities not simply as implementers of national policy, but as integral partners in the national climate effort. As Ambassador António Da Costa of Brazil's *Ministry of Cities* explained during the Daring Cities 2026 Bonn Dialogues (Riedemann, 2026), collaboration is conceived not as strictly top-down or bottom-up, but as cooperation among national, state and local governments working together. Brazil has a particular institutional advantage in this regard: a dedicated Ministry of Cities that provides a national-level counterpart focused specifically on urban development and municipal priorities, creating an important entry point for integrating cities into national climate processes.

Brazil's engagement as a CHAMP co-chair further reinforces this direction.

Further, Brazil's LGMA National Coordination Group provides an example of how this approach to climate federalism is being put into practice. Launched in March 2025, and co-convened by ICLEI and partners, the group brought together national ministries, state and municipal governments, municipal networks, international organizations, and civil society in a shared coordination space ahead of COP30, hosted by Brazil. Rather than engaging different levels of government separately, the mechanism enabled national and subnational actors to align positions, exchange knowledge, and jointly shape priorities. Over the course of 2025, the Group evolved into a working coordination mechanism with regular exchanges and shared agendas. Following COP30, participants emphasized the importance of consolidating this architecture through clearer roles and functions, stronger coordination among municipalities, states, and federal institutions, and regular opportunities for continued collaboration.



Brazil's approach to "climate federalism" recognizes states and cities not simply as implementers of national policy, but as integral partners in the national climate effort.

Source: Pixabay

Joint Planning Processes - Strategic and Sectoral Coordination

MLG&A becomes most effective when governments plan together from the start. Joint planning processes create opportunities to align priorities and identify approaches for coordination, also to inform implementation and reduce potential duplication, while increasing ownership across institutions. This collaborative approach is increasingly important for the preparation and subsequent update of NDCs, NAPs, Local Climate Action Plans, and integrated urban development strategies (GCoM & WRI, 2023).

ICLEI's GreenClimateCities™ Program provides an example of this integrated approach. GCC supports LRGs in developing climate action plans while strengthening alignment with national priorities, identifying climate finance opportunities, and offering guidance on multi-sectoral approaches and key components such as how to embed the just and equitable approach, working with youth, etc. This enables local planning to contribute to national climate objectives, while addressing local needs, challenges and opportunities.

Ensuring joint planning also supports territorial approaches that recognize functional urban areas and interconnections, metropolitan regions with many municipalities jointly coordinating, looking at watersheds and ecosystems that extend beyond a specific administrative boundary. Such approaches improve policy coherence while maximizing co-benefits across climate mitigation, adaptation, biodiversity, and sustainable development.

Colombia: From national climate commitments to locally led implementation

Colombia demonstrates how joint planning processes can help translate national climate commitments into locally led action. Under CHAMP, the World Resources Institute (WRI) has supported collaboration between the national government and municipalities to strengthen the integration of local priorities into Colombia's updated NDC and align municipal climate planning with national climate objectives. Working with the cities of Cali, Montería, Armenia, and Valledupar, WRI has helped review local climate and development plans, identify priority projects, and strengthen their alignment with Colombia's NDC and long-term climate strategy (E2050) (WRI, 2025; WRI, 2026a).

In Valledupar, for example, the municipality is working with the national Ministries of Environment and Housing to integrate climate objectives into its long-term land-use plan (*Plan de Ordenamiento Territorial*). This illustrates how national commitments can be incorporated into planning processes that guide local development and investment decisions. The Colombian experience shows the importance of connecting national climate ambition with municipal planning cycles, cross-departmental coordination, and project preparation. It also demonstrates that effective joint planning requires more than policy alignment: adequate technical capacity, financing, and capacity building remain essential to translate shared priorities into implementation.

The IMPACT Project in Africa – Building Collaborative Governance for Urban Climate Resilience

The IMPACT project in Africa (ICLEI Africa, n.d.) demonstrated the importance of collaborative governance in addressing complex and interconnected challenges related to urban climate resilience. The project's experience highlighted the need for multilevel governance and action (MLG&A) to prioritize relationship-building and adopt a whole-of-government approach, aligning the efforts of national ministries and local governments. Such an approach embeds institutional coordination in practical municipal planning and climate-resilient development, rather than treating coordination as an end in itself.

Collaborative Financing

One of the greatest barriers to accelerated implementation is the mismatch between institutional responsibilities and the flow of necessary financial resources for local implementation. While subnational governments frequently lead implementation, they often lack predictable, stable, and sufficient financing or even access to necessary financial resources (ICLEI, 2025c).

Collaborative financing mechanisms can strengthen MLG&A by aligning investment priorities across all levels of government while leveraging public and private finance. Shared investment planning, as well as enabling blended finance approaches, and climate-responsive budgeting help ensure that financial resources support jointly agreed priorities (ICLEI, n.d.-e).

ICLEI has increasingly integrated financing into its governance work, for example through the Transformative Actions Program (TAP) where local priority infrastructure projects seek project preparation support to become investment ready. This forms part of ICLEI's global climate impact program, the GCCTM Program and technical assistance on identifying priorities and co-developing complex urban projects. These experiences demonstrate that financial coordination is most effective at an early stage and when embedded within broader governance systems that jointly define priorities, responsibilities, and monitoring arrangements.

Although technical assistance and project preparation can strengthen investment readiness, actual financing remains dependent on project viability, available finance including guarantees and other derisking mechanisms, as well as the capacity of institutions and their partners to meet financing requirements.

Canada: Institutionalizing federal–municipal collaboration for local climate investment

Canada's Green Municipal Fund (GMF) illustrates how national governments can support locally led climate action through dedicated financing institutions and partnerships with municipal networks. Funded by the Government of Canada and administered by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM), the Fund provides financial and technical support to municipalities seeking to implement sustainable infrastructure, climate mitigation, and adaptation projects (FCM, n.d.; Natural Resources Canada, 2024).

The mechanism connects federal investment priorities with local government implementation responsibilities. Through grants, loans, and capacity-building support, municipalities can access resources to develop and deliver projects addressing locally identified needs, while contributing to broader national environmental and climate objectives. The Fund's institutional structure provides a continuing channel for cooperation between federal institutions and municipal governments, rather than relying exclusively on individual project agreements. ICLEI Canada complements this financing ecosystem through its longstanding partnership with FCM in the *Partners for Climate Protection* program, which supports municipalities in developing emissions inventories, setting targets, preparing local climate action plans, and advancing implementation.

Canada's experience demonstrates how national–local collaborative financing can be institutionalized through a municipal association that bridges federal funding and local implementation. It also highlights the value of combining dedicated financing instruments with technical assistance, planning capacity, and municipal networks to support sustained climate action.

Cameroon: Supporting Local Climate Ambition and Finance through TAP and FEICOM

Cameroon demonstrates how national public financing institutions can strengthen local governments' access to climate finance through dedicated funding mechanisms and institutional partnerships. The country's *Special Fund for Equipment and Intercommunal Intervention* (FEICOM) serves as a public financial intermediary, channeling resources from national budgets and international climate finance sources to municipalities. Through the *BRokering Innovation for Decentralised climate finance and Gender Equality* (BRIDGE) project, ICLEI Africa has partnered with FEICOM to improve municipal access to climate finance and support the development of locally led, gender-responsive climate projects.

This collaboration combines institutional strengthening and technical capacity development. Through a formal cooperation agreement, ICLEI Africa supports FEICOM in strengthening climate-responsive public investment, improving project preparation, and connecting municipalities with financing actors. The partnership supports the strengthening of FEICOM's *Climate Funding Window*, helping influence an annual public investment budget exceeding USD 15 million. In 2025, several municipalities accessed funding through FEICOM's climate financing mechanism. Gazawa Municipality, for example, secured approximately USD 271,358 for locally led adaptation initiatives, including reforestation, improved cookstoves, and climate-resilient food systems (ICLEI Africa, 2024; ICLEI Africa, 2026).

Complementing this institutional approach, ICLEI's Transformative Actions Program (TAP) provides a pathway for municipalities to develop climate investment proposals and connect with potential financing partners. Cameroonian projects in the TAP pipeline include Yaoundé IV's proposed industrial biodigester and plastic-waste recycling initiative (2018), aimed at converting waste into energy and recyclable products, and Nkor's proposed greenhouse and ecovillage development on a 15-hectare site in Dom (2021) (ICLEI, n.d.-e). ICLEI Africa also engaged directly with Yaoundé IV through BRIDGE in 2023 to explore cooperation on gender-sensitive municipal climate planning. While these TAP projects are distinct from the documented FEICOM-funded investments, they illustrate the importance of complementing financing mechanisms with a pipeline of locally initiated climate projects.

The Cameroon example shows how collaborative financing can be institutionalized through national financial intermediaries that connect public resources and international support with locally identified investment priorities. It demonstrates the importance of combining accessible financing mechanisms with capacity development and sustained partnerships to translate climate commitments into implementation.



View of a busy urban street in Yaounde.

Source: Unsplash

Shared Data and Monitoring

Reliable data, information and knowledge sharing provide the evidence base necessary for effective MLG&A. Shared or interconnected monitoring and reporting systems strengthen transparency, improve accountability, support adaptive management, and enable governments to measure collective progress toward climate objectives over time.

Integrated monitoring should use common indicators and harmonized reporting systems and data platforms. Robust Monitoring, Reporting, and Verification (MRV) systems enable governments to evaluate implementation, identify emerging challenges, and continuously improve policy effectiveness (CDP, 2025; Salehi et al., 2026).

ICLEI has extensive experience developing standardized climate reporting. CDP-ICLEI Track is one of the world's largest global reporting platforms for subnational governments, and a valuable repository of subnational climate data (ICLEI, 2026a). The platform enables LRGs to self-report GHG emissions, climate risks and vulnerabilities, mitigation and adaptation actions, as well as investment secured and finance needs, using internationally recognized methodologies. For example, it integrates climate finance reporting and aligns with the Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures (TCFD) recommendations. Beyond reporting, the data is also used to support benchmarking, inform peer learning, and tracking progress towards GCoM and other commitments (GCoM & WRI, 2023).

Open data platforms and shared digital infrastructure further strengthen effective MLG&A by increasing transparency, facilitating knowledge exchange, and supporting evidence-based decision-making. Together, these systems transform data into a strategic asset in the arsenal of national governments (ICLEI, 2018) (see the example of Baguio, Philippines below).

Beyond tracking climate action, CDP-ICLEI Track data can provide insights into reported cooperation between different levels of government. In 2025, more than 1,000 cities, states, and regions, representing over one billion people, reported through the platform. Analysis of these data can help identify patterns of intergovernmental cooperation and potential governance gaps. However, translating reporting insights into national policy decisions requires further analysis, institutional engagement, and follow-up. Further insights are presented in Annex C. For example, in 2025, more than 1,000 cities, subnational states, and regions - representing over one billion people - reported through the platform, providing a substantial evidence base for assessing subnational climate action. It explores how local governments engage with other levels, such as state, regional and national governments, on a variety of topics related to climate action. Such cooperation extends beyond formal reporting requirements to include information exchange, capacity development, and the integration of local climate priorities into wider national policy. These insights highlight the potential of standardized reporting systems not only to monitor climate progress, but also to identify governance gaps, strengthen policy coherence, and inform more effective national–subnational cooperation.

Baguio, Philippines: using climate reporting to align local and national priorities

Through the 2025–2026 One Planet Cities Challenge of WWF, ICLEI Southeast Asia and WWF-Philippines assessed Baguio's climate performance using data reported through CDP-ICLEI Track, including GHG emissions, climate targets, mitigation and adaptation measures. In May 2026, ICLEI presented localized findings and recommendations to city officials, assessing alignment with the Philippines NDC Implementation Plan and the National Adaptation Plan. The assessment identified gaps in emissions accounting and climate targets, informing a subsequent workshop with more than 50 municipal officials on local energy efficiency planning (ICLEI Southeast Asia, 2026).

Baguio illustrates how internationally standardized reporting, combined with targeted technical assistance, can translate climate data into actionable recommendations, strengthen local monitoring capacities, and support coherence between municipal climate strategies and national policy frameworks

The six mechanisms presented above offer different entry points for strengthening MLG&A. Their effectiveness depends not only on their design, but also on the commitment, capacities, and responsibilities of the institutions and stakeholders involved. The following recommendations translate the lessons emerging from these approaches into actions that different actors can take to establish more effective and lasting cooperation.

3.2 LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR KEY STAKEHOLDERS

All stakeholders involved in MLG&A should establish shared objectives, clarify their respective responsibilities, and agree on practical mechanisms for cooperation and follow-up. Coordination processes should be inclusive, adequately resourced, and linked to concrete planning and implementation priorities. Regular monitoring and review should be used to assess progress, identify barriers, and adjust responsibilities or approaches as needed. Particular attention should be given to ensuring that dialogue and institutional agreements lead to tangible actions and measurable results.

The following lessons and recommendations draw on ICLEI's extensive experience with MLG&A across different regions, programs, and partnerships. They reflect practical insights into what enables effective cooperation, strengthens institutional arrangements, and supports implementation, while also addressing persistent challenges and identifying priority actions for different stakeholders.

Cross-Cutting Lessons and Recommendations for All Stakeholders

In addition, effective MLG&A needs **local leadership that is connected to national and global decision-making.** ICLEI's Town Hall COP initiative illustrates this connection particularly clearly. Town Hall COPs are designed around three principles: they are local and community-led, nationally relevant, and transformation-oriented. Communities and local governments review climate progress and priorities, connect these to national climate plans, and communicate outcomes upward through national processes and, through ICLEI and the LGMA Constituency, to the UNFCCC process. This creates a governance pathway from communities to cities, national governments, and ultimately global climate governance.

WHOLE-OF-SOCIETY PARTICIPATION IN MLG&A

The experience of Town Hall COPs highlights the importance of local community members (particularly the most affected by the impacts of climate change, such as young people, women, and Indigenous Peoples), as well as the research community and academia, the private sector and other stakeholders hold knowledge, capacities, and resources essential to local climate implementation. Creating mechanisms through which these perspectives influence government decision-making can strengthen legitimacy and longevity of climate solutions while connecting climate action to priorities that communities experience directly, including health, jobs, affordability, nature, resilience, and social justice.

Another consistent lesson is that **MLG&A needs institutionalization support.** ICLEI's experience with National–Local Dialogues, metropolitan governance, and national-local planning processes demonstrates the limitations of relying on personal relationships or one-off projects. Political leadership can initiate collaboration, but lasting governance requires mechanisms that continue when individuals, administrations, or political priorities change. Local government associations, metropolitan bodies, intergovernmental committees, sector working groups, recurring National–Local Dialogues, and formal national-subnational coordination platforms can provide this continuity.

Metropolitan governance is particularly important because many climate systems do not correspond to administrative boundaries. ICLEI's integrated climate work demonstrates the need to combine vertical coordination between national, regional, and local governments with horizontal cooperation among neighboring jurisdictions (Ipekoglu, 2026). Metropolitan institutions and coordination platforms can therefore provide an important intermediary scale for translating national frameworks into territorial action.

Finally, effective MLG&A requires **a massive disbursement of reliable financial resources, technical and non-technical capacity, as well as evidence and quality data.** ICLEI's 2026 Integrated Sustainable Urban Development Assessment (ISUDA), based on 23 UrbanShift cities across Africa, Asia, and Latin America, found substantial progress in integrated urban development while continuing to identify fragmented institutions, limited data systems, and finance shortfalls as persistent barriers (Salehi et al., 2026). This reinforces a recurring lesson across ICLEI's work: climate responsibilities without corresponding financial resources, technical capacity, availability of quality data, and institutional support will not yield effective and sustainable results in terms of climate action.

A recurring lesson is that MLG&A must remain adaptive and iterative. Climate risks, institutional capacities, and policy priorities evolve over time, requiring governments to regularly review progress, incorporate new evidence, and adjust their approaches.

Established feedback loops between national policy and local implementation can support continuous learning, improve coordination, and strengthen the effectiveness of climate action.

Progress should be measured and assessed across distinct stages - from dialogue and institutional agreements to joint planning, financing, implementation, and measurable climate outcomes - to ensure that preparatory achievements are not mistaken for completed delivery. A regular review and re-adjustment process should also be planned for.

Recommendations for National Governments

National governments play a critical enabling role. They establish the legal, regulatory, fiscal, and institutional frameworks within which local and regional climate action takes place. Their primary task is therefore to create ripe conditions under which subnational governments can contribute fully to national climate objectives.

National governments need to institutionalize meaningful participation of LRGs throughout the climate policy cycle, including the development, implementation, monitoring, and revision of NDCs, NAPs, NBSAPs, and LT-LEDS. CHAMP provides an important framework for doing so, but commitments should be translated into permanent national governance arrangements rather than one-off dialogues and voluntary consultation processes (ICLEI, n.d.-b).

National–Local Dialogues, Town Hall COPs, intergovernmental climate councils, and sector working groups can provide complementary mechanisms for this engagement. Where possible, these mechanisms should build on existing institutional structures and include clear responsibilities for follow-up.

Governments should establish a shared monitoring framework that identifies responsible institutions, agreed milestones, financing status, outstanding barriers, and measurable results for each jointly prioritized action.

National governments need to also ensure that mandates are matched with adequate resources. Responsibilities assigned to LRGs should be accompanied by appropriate access to finance, technical support, data, and capacity development. National financing systems should increasingly recognize locally identified climate priorities and create pathways through which investment-ready local projects can access domestic and international finance.

Finally, national governments should treat local implementation experience as a source of evidence for national policy. Cities and regions can function as labs for climate innovation, testing approaches that can subsequently be replicated or scaled at national or regional level. Structured mechanisms for capturing and incorporating this experience can make national climate policies tangible.

Recommendations for Regional and Supranational Institutions

Regional organizations and supranational bodies, such as the European Union, play an increasingly important role in shaping the policy and financing frameworks that guide national and local climate action. They should ensure and monitor the meaningful participation of LRGs in national climate planning processes, including, in the EU context, National Energy and Climate Plans (NECPs) and Social Climate Plans. They should also facilitate direct access to technical assistance, programs, and funding opportunities for LRGs, particularly where national mechanisms are insufficient or difficult to access. The partnership principle embedded in EU cohesion policy illustrates how multilevel cooperation can be institutionalized as an integral requirement of investment planning and implementation, rather than treated as an afterthought.

Recommendations for Local and Regional Governments

LRGs should position themselves not only as implementers of national climate commitments but as real and equal partners in shaping climate policy and action. This requires alignment of their Local Climate Action Plans and sector strategies with national commitments while maintaining locally appropriate priorities and approaches. Frameworks such as ICLEI's GCC can support an iterative process of analyzing climate challenges, identifying opportunities, acting through integrated planning and implementation, and accelerating action through monitoring and continuous adjustment (ICLEI, n.d.-d).

Strong evidence is essential to this engagement. LRGs need to strengthen GHG inventories, climate risk and vulnerability assessments, target-setting, and climate reporting. The CDP-ICLEI Track helps make local climate action visible while generating data that can contribute to national and global climate monitoring (ICLEI, 2026a).

LRGs need to also use their convening role to build strong and lasting climate partnerships. Town Hall COPs, stakeholder forums, participatory planning processes, and partnerships with academia, local communities, businesses, and civil society can connect climate strategies to local priorities while strengthening overall whole-of-society ownership.

Finally, cities and regions should collaborate with one another. Municipal networks, local government associations, metropolitan coordination bodies, and ICLEI's global network provide opportunities for peer learning and collective advocacy. A coordinated LRG voice is often more effective in influencing national policy than individual municipalities acting independently.

Recommendations for Donors and Funders

Development partners and climate funders play an important role in shaping governance through the programs and investments they support. Funding should therefore strengthen institutions and relationships as well as individual climate projects.

Funding for MLG&A should prioritize the institutional capacities and coordination processes necessary for effective implementation. This includes supporting National–Local Dialogues, stakeholder engagement, shared data systems, project preparation, and local capacity development. Although these activities are sometimes treated as secondary project costs, they are essential investments in the enabling environment for climate action.

Funding models need to also move beyond short project cycles. Building trust, institutional capacity, and effective coordination across levels of government takes time. Long-term and flexible funding can enable MLG&A mechanisms to become institutionalized and live long past specific lighthouse projects.

Funders need to increase direct and indirect access to finance for LRGs while supporting the development of investment-ready project pipelines. Initiatives such as ICLEI's Transformative Actions Program (TAP) demonstrate the importance of connecting ambitious local climate infrastructure concepts with technical assistance, project preparation, and potential financing partners (ICLEI, n.d.-e).

Finally, donors need to encourage vertical and horizontal integration across their own portfolios. Separate national and local programs operating within the same country can unintentionally reinforce the institutional fragmentation and internal competition for resources that a successful MLG&A model seeks to overcome. Program design should instead incentivize collaboration between national ministries, subnational governments, local government associations, financial institutions, and implementation partners around shared outcomes.

MLG&A does not require every country to adopt the same institutional model. It requires governance systems capable of connecting climate ambition with implementation, national frameworks with territorial realities, and government leadership with whole-of-society action. ICLEI's experience demonstrates that when these connections are sustained through relationships of trust, clear mandates, adequate resources, shared evidence, and institutionalized mechanisms, MLG&A truly becomes a driver for global change.

4

ICLEI's Approach from Dialogue to Implementation

The preceding Chapter identified practical mechanisms and stakeholder responsibilities for advancing MLG&A. This chapter considers how these elements can be brought together within an iterative implementation process.

Drawing on ICLEI's GreenClimateCities™ (GCC) global experience, it illustrates how governments can move from identifying governance challenges and convening stakeholders to joint planning, coordinated implementation, monitoring, and continuous improvement.

ICLEI's decade-long experience working with LRGs demonstrates that effective MLG&A is not a single event or action, but rather an iterative process through which governments analyze their context, act collaboratively, learn from implementation, and accelerate successful approaches. This is reflected in the logic of ICLEI's GCC methodology, which guides LRGs through the three phases of Analyze, Act, and Accelerate (ICLEI, n.d.-d), also embedding MLG&A. The process combines climate assessment and planning with implementation, also monitoring, reporting and verification. It recognizes the importance of National-Local Dialogue and cooperation - each level of government depending on the other and collectively delivering results.

4.1 GCC PROCESS GUIDANCE ON MLG&A

The GCC Program's process is based on a logical iteration and natural progress through three phases, each with three steps that unfold in three substeps (see Figure 2 on the next page). It follows the typical process within government, starting with assessing the local context, including the governance landscape and institutional arrangements. Are the existing structures, processes and mechanisms adequate and fit for purpose? New coordination arrangements may be needed. By mapping existing mandates, roles and responsibilities, gaps and challenges may be identified that need to be addressed (Vecchiato, 2026). This means looking into the latest national and subnational climate plans, also relevant legislation (potentially missing legislation or regulations that are required to ensure an enabling framework is in place). Is adequate capacity and resourcing at hand to deal with the climate challenge? Is it clear how to finance any additional requirements up to infrastructure investment needs? Are decision-making processes, also formal and informal coordination mechanisms adequate? Are decision-makers science-informed? In the Analyze phase, the purpose is to conduct a comprehensive exercise, especially to determine what is in place, ready to engage and to identify where gaps, overlaps, or bottlenecks exist and prevent effective MLG&A. The assessment should also consider the different dimensions: political, social, economic, technical, data, capacity - as outlined in Chapter 2.

Part of this analysis is also to identify all key stakeholders needed to co-deliver the intended outcomes of the Climate Action Plan. MLG&A requires moving beyond the institutions conventionally responsible for climate work and actively involving the whole-of-society. This may mean, involving national line ministries, local government associations, utilities, financial institutions, academia, youth organizations, and the insurance sector. Sector specific engagement is needed. It is recommended to not only consult, but to establish long-term relationships and engagement approaches, starting with the identification of common priorities (ICLEI, 2025c).

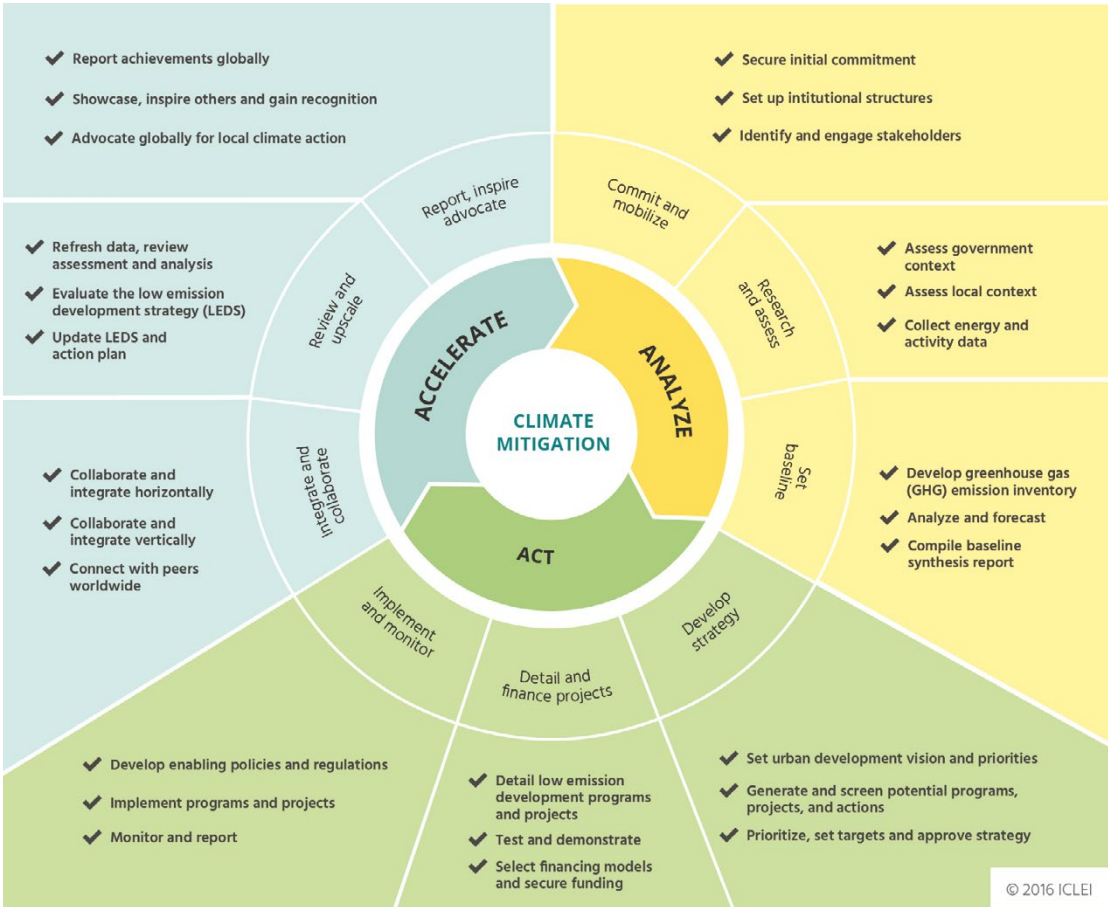


Figure 2.
The GCC Program climate planning process.

Source: ICLEI

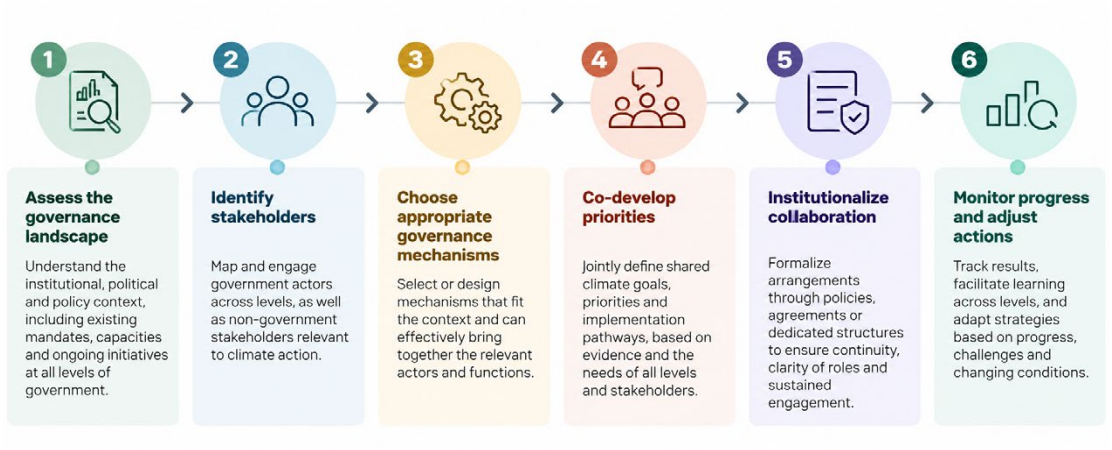


Figure 3.
Six-stage MLG&A roadmap.

Source: ICLEI

Based on this assessment, governments can select the most appropriate governance mechanisms. Several mechanisms presented in Chapter 3 are complementary rather than mutually exclusive. A National-Local Dialogue may be appropriate where governments are ready to share priorities and as a trust-building component. A permanent intergovernmental platform may be required where coordination needs to be sustained over time. Joint planning can align NDCs, NAPs, NBSAPs and local climate action plans that address climate change mitigation, adaptation, resilience and biodiversity. Collaborative financing mechanisms can ensure priorities are taken to investment. Shared data and monitoring systems can establish transparency and accountability, tracking progress. Town Hall COPs can further connect community priorities and local implementation experience with national climate planning and the global UNFCCC process.

Once the appropriate mechanism is in place, stakeholders need to co-develop priorities and interventions. This represents the shift from consultation toward joint ownership. Co-development often results in joint recommendations, governance roadmaps, policy reforms, investment priorities, implementation plans, or agreed inputs into NDCs and NAPs. Under UrbanShift, ICLEI's National-Local Dialogue methodology moved beyond discussion to the development of country roadmaps jointly owned by national and local governments, creating a basis for continued multilevel action after the dialogues themselves (see page 33).

The next step is to institutionalize collaboration so that cooperation does not depend on a single project, meeting, or political champion. Agreed responsibilities should be anchored within existing institutional mandates when possible and supported through formal agreements. Institutionalization is particularly important for maintaining momentum across various administrative cycles. ICLEI's experience illustrates that dialogue mechanisms can evolve into more durable governance arrangements when national ministries, local government associations, and LRGs jointly assume ownership of the process.

Finally, governments should monitor progress, learn, and adjust action. This corresponds closely to the Accelerate dimension of GCC. Implementation should generate evidence that informs the next cycle of decision-making. Shared, cyclical reporting systems can track whether agreed actions are being delivered, whether governance arrangements are functioning effectively, and whether they are producing the intended climate outcomes. Monitoring should therefore assess both what is being achieved and how effectively institutions are working together to achieve it. ICLEI's GCC methodology explicitly incorporates MRV as part of its approach to demonstrating local commitment, capacity, and results. Lessons from implementation should feed back into governance assessments, priorities, institutional arrangements, and future climate plans, creating a continuous cycle of improvement toward common wellbeing goals.

Taken together, these steps provide a flexible and easily tailored pathway for LRGs to follow. Countries and territories can enter at different points depending on their individual country context and capacities. The central objective is to establish a continuous feedback loop between dialogue, planning, implementation, monitoring, and increased ambition, allowing national policy and local action to reinforce one another over time.

4.2 APPLYING MULTILEVEL GOVERNANCE ACROSS SECTORS

Through its five interconnected pathways toward *zero emission, resilient, nature-based, equitable, and circular development*, ICLEI recognizes that urban systems and climate solutions are interdependent. Decisions concerning energy influence transport and buildings; decisions concerning water management affect waste and land-use planning; decisions concerning climate action affect long-term sustainable development considerations. MLG&A provides the institutional connections needed to manage these complex interdependencies, while ensuring that sector-specific action contributes to wider local, national, and global climate objectives.

The energy transition demonstrates particularly clearly why responsibilities across levels of government need to be aligned. National governments generally determine energy policy, regulation, market structures, national targets, and investment frameworks. At the same time, LRGs influence energy demand and renewable energy deployment through spatial planning, public buildings and assets, permitting, municipal utilities, transport systems, and engagement with the local community and the private sector. A local government may therefore have ambitious renewable energy targets while depending on lagging national regulation, grid infrastructure, and energy market rules that sit outside its direct mandate.

ICLEI's 100% Renewables Cities and Regions Roadmap project (ICLEI, n.d.-g) demonstrates how MLG&A can address this challenge. Implemented with LRGs in Argentina, Indonesia, and Kenya, the initiative placed collaboration between national and subnational governments at the center of the energy transition. It combined local renewable energy roadmaps with capacity building, extensive data collection and energy modeling, multilevel governance and policy dialogues, and the development of bankable projects. The approach deliberately sought to ensure that locally driven renewable energy transition measures contribute to national energy and climate targets, including NDC implementation. The resulting ICLEI Roadmap Framework also recognizes that energy transitions need to be adapted to local circumstances rather than implemented through a standardized approach.

Sustainable mobility presents a different challenge. Mobility systems often physically extend beyond municipal administrative boundaries, while responsibilities for roads, public transport, rail, land use, infrastructure investment, and transport finance lie in national, regional, and metropolitan authorities. Decisions made by these levels of government can therefore enable or hinder the ability of the local authorities to reduce transport emissions.

ICLEI's work on EcoMobility emphasizes integrated, socially inclusive mobility systems that prioritize walking, cycling, public transport, and shared mobility (ICLEI, n.d.-c). Delivering this transition requires more than individual transport projects. Local governments can redesign streets, engage communities, influence land-use patterns, and improve local public transport, but national and regional governments often determine vehicle standards, major infrastructure investments, taxation, and broader transport policy. Metropolitan coordination becomes particularly important where daily mobility patterns cross jurisdictional boundaries. Multilevel governance in the transport sector therefore requires *vertical* alignment of policy and investment alongside *horizontal* coordination among neighboring municipalities, transport authorities, urban planners, infrastructure providers, and communities (ICLEI, n.d.-c).

ICLEI's engagement in the Transformative Urban Mobility Initiative (TUMI) E-Bus Mission provides a practical illustration of these interdependencies. Supported by Germany's Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), the initiative brings together city governments, public transport operators, technical partners, and financing actors to address the institutional, operational, and financial challenges of electrifying urban bus fleets (ICLEI, n.d.-h). Through the TUMI E-Bus Mission City Network, led by ICLEI and the International Association of Public Transport (UITP), participating cities exchange experiences and strengthen capacities to align local transport transitions with broader policy and investment frameworks.

Water management requires yet another configuration because water systems follow hydrological rather than administrative boundaries. Bodies of water such as rivers and lakes, as well as watersheds, groundwater systems, and their associated flood risks frequently cross multiple municipal, regional, and national boundaries. Responsibilities may simultaneously be distributed among national water authorities, regional governments, municipalities, utilities, and private or community providers. Climate change further increases such interdependencies as drought, flooding, water scarcity, water quality and places additional pressure on infrastructure and ecosystems (Corfee-Morlot et al., 2009).

ICLEI's work on resilient and circular urban water management recognizes that effective water governance depends on clearly defined responsibilities across levels of government and collaboration with civil society and the private sector. From an MLG&A perspective, this means connecting national water and adaptation policies with watershed and regional planning, local infrastructure investment, land-use decisions, and community-level implementation. ICLEI's Circular and Resilient Urban Water Management work further illustrates how LRGs can address water scarcity and flood risk through approaches that simultaneously strengthen resilience, resource efficiency, and circularity.

Circular development similarly requires coordination across governance levels, particularly where municipal waste management, construction, public procurement, and resource recovery depend on national legislation and regional market conditions. Through the EU-funded CityLoops initiative, led by ICLEI Europe, ICLEI has supported municipalities in testing circular solutions for construction and demolition waste and biowaste. Lessons from these local demonstrations informed recommendations for national and EU policymakers, illustrating how municipal innovation can identify regulatory and institutional barriers and help shape more enabling frameworks for circular transitions (CityLoops, n.d.; Gresset et al., 2023).

Across these sectors, the distribution of responsibilities differs, but the underlying MLG&A challenge remains consistent: local implementation depends on enabling frameworks and decisions taken beyond the local level, while national climate ambition depends on action delivered locally. Effective MLG&A therefore creates feedback loops through which local implementation experience informs national policy, while national governments provide the regulatory, financial, and institutional conditions needed to accelerate local action. ICLEI's integrated climate action approach outlined in the GCC program provides an important foundation for identifying these connections and avoiding sectoral silos.

5

Multilevel governance in practice

Cases

The principles, mechanisms, and implementation approaches presented in the preceding Chapters take different forms depending on institutional contexts, sectoral priorities, and local capacities.

The following cases illustrate how MLG&A has been applied in practice across different countries and sectors, highlighting the roles of national and subnational governments, the importance of stakeholder collaboration, and the outcomes achieved.

The examples also distinguish between different stages of progress, including strengthened coordination, joint planning, project preparation, policy recommendations, and implementation. They demonstrate that effective MLG&A is not defined by a single institutional model, but by the ability of governance arrangements to support cooperation, address implementation barriers, and generate tangible results over time.

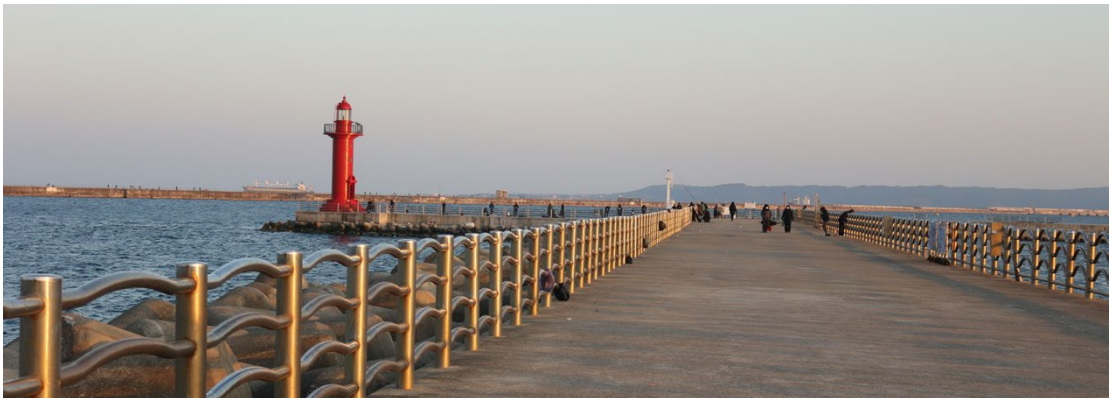
REPUBLIC OF KOREA

Different pathways from governance to implementation

The Republic of Korea shows how a common national enabling framework can translate into different locally led approaches to climate governance and implementation. Korea's national carbon neutrality framework assigns important responsibilities to local governments while allowing climate policies to respond to local economic, social, and environmental circumstances. ICLEI Korea's case studies demonstrate how cities and districts have used this space to develop governance arrangements suited to their particular implementation challenges.

In *Yeosu*, a major industrial city, the Climate Change Joint Consultative Group provides a standing mechanism for engaging stakeholders in the monitoring of GHG emission reduction and climate adaptation policies, helping the city navigate fragmented responsibilities and its limited authority over industrial emissions (ICLEI Korea, 2025). In *Seongbuk*, public-private governance and community-based Energy Saving Stations enable residents to participate directly and continuously in delivering local energy and carbon-neutrality objectives (Yoon, 2025). In *Pohang*, the Greenway Project demonstrates how local sustainability ambitions can translate into integrated urban transformation, using nature-based development to simultaneously expand green space, strengthen carbon sinks, reduce air pollution, and enhance climate resilience (Cheon, 2026).

Together, the three cases demonstrate that effective climate governance is not defined by a single institutional model. National enabling frameworks can provide direction and mandate, while local governance arrangements determine how different actors are coordinated, communities are mobilized, and climate objectives are ultimately translated into tangible action.



City of Pohang.
Source: Pixabay

FIJI

Translating national climate priorities into locally owned action

Fiji demonstrates how national-local cooperation can translate climate commitments into concrete municipal planning and investment priorities. Through the *GCoM Technical Support Services program*, implemented by ICLEI Oceania with European Union support, local authorities worked alongside national government institutions to strengthen climate planning and develop priority projects addressing locally identified risks (ICLEI Oceania, 2025a).

In October 2025, ICLEI convened representatives from eight Fijian towns and cities, the Ministry of Housing and Local Government, and national climate officials to review the program's achievements and identify pathways toward implementation. Climate Action Plans were formally presented to Nadi, Labasa, and Savusavu, accompanied by pre-feasibility work on priority interventions. Improved waste management, flood mitigation, and urban drainage emerged as shared priorities, demonstrating how local needs can inform coordinated climate action across governance levels (ICLEI Oceania, 2025a).

Fiji's experience illustrates how national institutional engagement, municipal leadership, and technical assistance can reinforce one another to move climate action from planning toward investment preparation. It highlights the importance of equipping LRGs with practical implementation tools while maintaining national-local cooperation to mobilize the resources needed for delivery.

The completed municipal climate plans and pre-feasibility studies are tangible planning achievements. However, financing and physical implementation of the identified priority projects remain subsequent steps for Fiji.



Presentation of CAP to Nadi Special Administrators (mayor equivalents) and CEO.

Source: ICLEI Oceania

AVELLANEDA, ARGENTINA

Linking local renewable energy ambition with national frameworks

The City of Avellaneda in Santa Fe Province Argentina illustrates how locally driven energy transitions depend on solid MLG&A (ICLEI, 2024a). Through ICLEI's 100% Renewables Cities and Regions Roadmap (ICLEI, 2024b), the municipality worked with ICLEI Argentina, ICLEI South America, and the ICLEI World Secretariat to develop a pathway toward 100% renewable energy by 2050.

Avellaneda's transition pathway was shaped by its specific territorial and economic context. With a significant agricultural and industrial base, the city identified bioenergy as an important opportunity alongside solar photovoltaic energy, energy efficiency, and the decarbonization of transport. The roadmap was developed through a participatory process and supported by energy modeling, stakeholder engagement, assessment of regulatory frameworks, and analysis of local renewable energy resources (ICLEI, 2024a).

Importantly, the process went beyond developing a local energy plan. ICLEI supported participating governments in undertaking multilevel governance and policy dialogues, strengthening capacities related to energy and finance, and translating identified priorities into projects suitable for implementation and investment. In Avellaneda, this included support for developing a bankable proposal for a 5 MWp solar park (ICLEI, 2024b; ICLEI, 2024c).

The case demonstrates the complementary roles required for an effective local energy transition. Municipal leadership can identify local resources, mobilize stakeholders, establish ambitious targets, and develop projects, while provincial and national frameworks influence regulation, energy markets, infrastructure, and financing conditions. Connecting these levels allows local action to contribute to Argentina's climate and energy objectives while enabling national policies to respond more effectively to local needs and realities.

WEST NUSA TENGGARA, INDONESIA

Translating subnational experience into national policy recommendations

Also supported through ICLEI's 100% Renewables Cities and Regions Roadmap (ICLEI, n.d.-g), the West Nusa Tenggara Province (ICLEI, 2024d) developed a pathway toward a renewable energy system that responds to its specific development priorities. The roadmap focuses particularly on reducing dependence on imported fossil fuels by utilizing renewable energy resources, including bioenergy from agricultural waste, while improving energy efficiency in buildings and industry.

As in Avellaneda, ICLEI's approach combined technical analysis with governance and implementation support. The province worked with the ICLEI World Secretariat, ICLEI Southeast Asia, and ICLEI Indonesia on energy data collection and modeling, capacity development, multilevel policy dialogue, and the identification of projects capable of moving toward investment.

Crucially, lessons generated through LRG implementation were also used to inform National Policy Recommendations for Indonesia (Wijaya et al., 2024). Developed through the 100% Renewables initiative, these recommendations specifically address how the national government can create enabling conditions for renewable energy transitions at the subnational level. This demonstrates the iterative character of MLG&A: national frameworks enable subnational action, but experience from cities and regions can in turn identify regulatory, financial, and institutional barriers and provide evidence for improving national policy.



As a specific participatory tool for gathering stakeholders' input, ICLEI designed the Sustainable Energy Transition Strategy (SETS) 'serious game' with the aim of bringing together stakeholders to address the various challenges involved in the energy transition. On the photo: Key stakeholders participate in the serious game (SETS) activity on July 25, 2023 in WNT Province.

Source: 100% Renewables Roadmap for West Nusa Tenggara Province, Indonesia. ICLEI, 2024.

HØJE-TAASTRUP, DENMARK

Linking municipal circular innovation with national and European policy

Through the EU-funded *CityLoops initiative*, coordinated by ICLEI Europe, Høje-Taastrup joined six other European cities in testing circular solutions for construction and demolition waste and biowaste management (CityLoops, n.d.). One demonstration involved recovering concrete from demolition and reusing it in the foundations of the city's new town hall, illustrating how municipal construction and procurement can support resource efficiency. The wider CityLoops experience also revealed regulatory, procurement, and market barriers that require action beyond the municipal level.

Drawing on lessons from the participating cities, CityLoops developed 12 recommendations for national and EU policymakers to strengthen enabling frameworks for circular development. Høje-Taastrup illustrates the bottom-up dimension of MLG&A: local implementation can generate evidence to inform higher-level policies and help scale successful circular solutions (Gresset et al., 2023).

Together, these examples demonstrate that sectoral MLG&A creates a two-way pathway between national enabling frameworks and locally led implementation. LRGs provide the testing ground for innovation, community mobilization, and private sector engagement. National governments can enable these efforts through supportive regulation, finance, infrastructure, and policy frameworks while using lessons from implementation to strengthen national climate ambition.

This reflects a central principle of ICLEI's approach: LRGs are not only implementers of national climate policy, they are essential partners in identifying priorities, and designing and testing the solutions needed to achieve national and global climate goals.

NAIROBI, KENYA

Coordinating metropolitan governance for electric mobility

As one of the TUMI E-Bus Mission's 20 Deep Dive Cities, Nairobi worked through the Nairobi Metropolitan Area Transport Authority (NaMATA), which coordinates transport planning across five counties. NaMATA brings together national transport and treasury authorities with county governments, providing an institutional framework for aligning metropolitan mobility priorities and infrastructure investment (NaMATA, n.d.-a).

Through the TUMI partnership, NaMATA developed an electric mobility roadmap, strengthened technical capacities, and advanced work on electricity-grid readiness for bus electrification. These activities supported coordination among transport institutions, technical experts, and international partners to address regulatory, operational, and infrastructure challenges (NaMATA, n.d.-b).

Nairobi demonstrates how established national–county governance structures, combined with technical cooperation, can support the transition toward low-emission public transport. Its experience highlights the importance of aligning national policy, metropolitan planning, and institutional capacity to advance locally ambitious climate action.

EUROPEAN UNION – CLIMATE CITY CONTRACTS

From Shared Commitments to Coordinated Implementation

Under the EU Mission 100 *Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities by 2030*, Climate City Contracts (CCCs) demonstrate how cities can bring together multiple levels of government and diverse stakeholders around shared climate-neutrality goals. Rather than legally binding agreements, CCCs combine written stakeholder commitments, a Climate Neutrality Action Plan, and a Climate Neutrality Investment Plan to support coordinated planning, financing, and implementation (European Commission, 2021; Gugu et al., 2025).

Across 107 participating cities, 3,202 stakeholders have provided written commitments, including businesses (43%), government and public institutions (31%), civil society organizations (15%), and knowledge institutions (11%) (Palmia, 2026, forthcoming). These commitments range from political endorsements to concrete contributions toward implementation and financing. In Finland, for example, two national ministries jointly committed to supporting six Mission Cities through national strategies, funding mechanisms, and cooperation networks.

The Action Plan aligns local priorities with regional, national, and European policies, while the Investment Plan identifies financing needs and priority projects, helping cities engage potential investors and financial institutions. Cities whose CCCs receive a positive review are awarded the EU Mission Label, which provides access to additional investment preparation and financing support through the Climate City Capital Hub (NetZeroCities, n.d.).

Importantly, CCCs are iterative governance processes. Cities and their partners regularly revisit commitments, actions, and investment priorities as implementation advances, strengthening accountability and translating shared ambitions into coordinated climate action (European Commission, 2021; Gugu et al., 2025).

6

Conclusion: From shared ambition to coordinated action

Accelerating climate action requires more than ambitious commitments, well-designed policies, or individual projects. It requires governance arrangements that connect responsibilities, resources, knowledge, and implementation across levels of government and society.

The approaches and experiences presented in this Guide demonstrate that successful MLG&A is not a single institutional model or a one-time consultation process. It is an ongoing commitment to cooperation, shared ownership, and collective delivery. National–Local Dialogues, Town Hall COPs, permanent coordination platforms, joint planning processes, collaborative financing, and shared monitoring systems offer complementary opportunities to strengthen these connections.

The examples also demonstrate that progress must be assessed realistically. Establishing dialogue, developing a roadmap, or preparing an investment proposal can represent important achievements, but these are not equivalent to completed implementation or measurable climate outcomes. Continuous progress requires clearly adequate resources as well as regular monitoring and adjustment.

The priority is therefore to move from dialogue to shared decisions, from shared decisions to coordinated implementation, and from implementation to measurable results. National governments, local and regional governments, regional and supranational institutions, and other stakeholders each have distinct but complementary responsibilities in enabling this progression.

There is no universal blueprint for effective MLG&A. Governments should build on existing institutions, adapt mechanisms to their respective contexts, and invest in the relationships and capacities needed for long-term cooperation. By treating governance as an enabler of action rather than an end in itself, they can strengthen the translation of global and national climate commitments into locally relevant, inclusive, and lasting results.

Annexes

The following annexes complement the Guide by offering practical resources, actionable guidance, and real-world insights to support multilevel climate governance and action. They include an infographic illustrating key concepts, guidelines and checklists for organizing a Town Hall COP, and insights from the 2025 CDP-ICLEI Track reporting cycle. Together, these resources aim to inspire collaboration, facilitate stakeholder engagement, and support the translation of multilevel governance principles into concrete climate action.

ANNEX A

Understanding Multilevel Governance and Action: An infographic

→ ACCESS HERE

ANNEX B

Organizing a Town Hall COP: Event Guidelines and Practical Checklists

→ ACCESS HERE

ANNEX C

Multilevel Climate Governance and Action: Insights from CDP-ICLEI Track Reporting (2025)

→ ACCESS HERE

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