

# **The Role of Side Events in the UNFCCC Climate Negotiations**

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## **Abstract**

United Nations (UN) climate change conferences have attracted a rapidly increasing number and range of observer participants, oftentimes outnumbering national delegates. Can this phenomenon be dismissed as the ‘climate change circus’ or ‘climate change tourism’ or are new agents and actors emerging? If so, are they influencing the decisions made in the negotiation process? Our interviews document that non-nation state actors (NNSAs) see themselves as more effective, efficient and faster at tackling climate change than nation-states because of the difficulty and slowness of the UN process in reaching agreements. But it is also recognised that having a rigorous international policy framework is critical for achieving long-term deep cuts in greenhouse gas emissions. This paper investigates the emergent role of NNSAs at the UN climate negotiations. How do NNSAs exercise agency in the annual Conference of the Parties (COPs) and how can we evaluate their significance? The research is based on participant observations and a survey and interviews conducted about the official UN Side Events at COP-13 and COP-14 in 2007 and 2008, investigating why NNSAs attended and what they hoped to achieve..

## **Keywords**

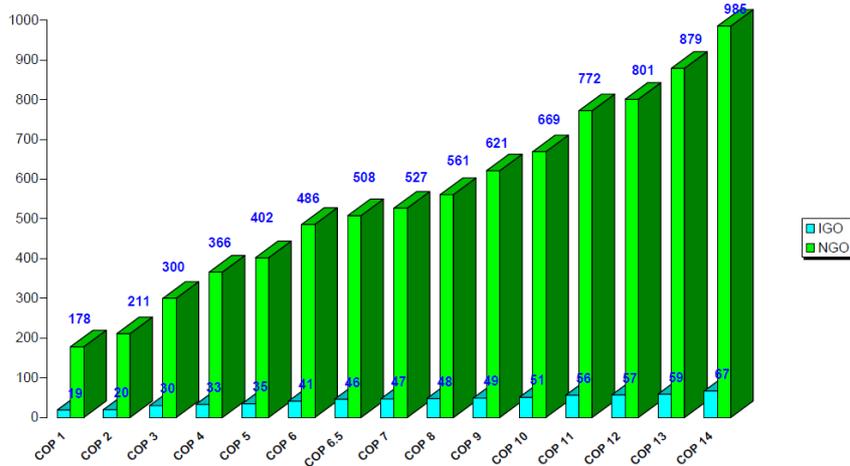
UNFCCC; Side Events; Non-Nation State Actors (NNSAs); Conference of the Parties (COPs)

# 1 Introduction

There is growing interest in the role of non-nation state actors (NNSAs) in governing climate change. The majority of this research has concentrated on activities, initiatives and programmes taking place in disparate locations and at different times, ranging from voluntary offset markets (Bumpus and Liverman 2008; Lovell, Bulkeley et al. 2009) to climate change initiatives by global cities (Schroeder and Bulkeley 2009; Bulkeley et al. 2009). In contrast, in this paper we assess the role of NNSAs at one particular event – the annual session of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conference of the Parties, referred to as the ‘COP’. The COP is the “supreme body” of the UNFCCC and is mandated to periodically examine the obligations of the Parties and the institutional arrangements under the Convention and to promote and facilitate the exchange of information on measures to address climate change (UNFCCC 1992; Article 7.2). The COP is held in a different location each year depending on which country proposes to host it.

There has in recent years been a dramatic increase in attendance at the COPs by NNSAs, as demonstrated in Figure 1, which shows that just over one thousand non-governmental and intergovernmental organisations had observer status under the UNFCCC as of the 2008 COP-14 in Poznan, nearly double the number from around five years previously of around 600 at COP-8 in 2003. Each registered observer organisation can nominate any number of people to attend. Indeed, this is evident in Figure 2, which shows the significant increase in the number of observers compared to national delegates at the COPs. It is indeed striking that observers have outnumbered delegates at the majority of COP meetings. At COP-15 to be held in mid December 2009, the number of NGO and intergovernmental observer organisation delegates so far registered is at a record figure of 14,000.

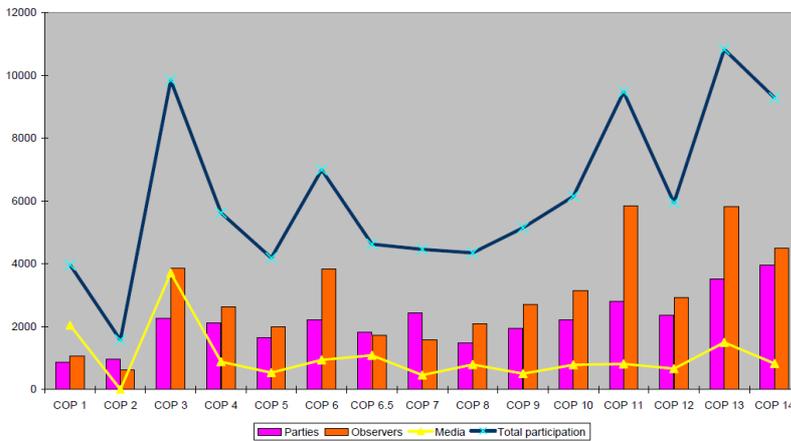
Figure 1: Progressive admission of observer organisations, COP-1 to COP-14



Source:

[http://unfccc.int/files/parties\\_and\\_observers/ngo/application/pdf/2007\\_progressive\\_admission.pdf](http://unfccc.int/files/parties_and_observers/ngo/application/pdf/2007_progressive_admission.pdf)

Figure 2: Participation breakdown COP1-COP14



Source:

[http://unfccc.int/files/parties\\_and\\_observers/ngo/application/pdf/2007\\_overall\\_participation.pdf](http://unfccc.int/files/parties_and_observers/ngo/application/pdf/2007_overall_participation.pdf)

Here we explore why NNSAs are attending the COPs in increasing numbers and what they are doing there, based on research conducted at COP-13 (2007, Bali) and COP-14 (2008, Poznan). We demonstrate how the COPs are an important – and theoretically relatively neglected – annual focal point for NNSA climate mitigation and adaptation activities. Elsewhere we have discussed how NNSAs see themselves as ‘more effective, efficient and faster’ at tackling climate change than nation-states (Lovell 2007). In this paper, we aim to

assess precisely how NNSAs try to fulfil this objective at the COPs, and question to what extent they are developing agency in the international climate policy arena. We use the Biermann et al. (2009, p. 37) definition of agency as the ability of actors to prescribe behaviour and to “substantively participate in and/or set their own rules related to the interactions between humans and their natural environment”.

The paper is based on a wider research project funded by the UK Tyndall Centre for Climate Change research studying the significant initiatives being undertaken by NNSAs in order to understand how they are reducing GHG emissions and what this means for climate change governance. It sits alongside a number of detailed case studies of specific NNSAs where we have focused on the drivers and barriers to emission reductions and the role of the post-2012 climate regime in influencing their actions. Our cases include major international cities (London, Los Angeles, Mexico City and Melbourne), businesses (Shell, Scottish Power and Corus Group) and carbon offset organizations (EcoSecurities and Climate Care).

At COP-13 and COP-14 we conducted a survey of a sample of side events (#119 in total; #56 at COP-13 and #63 at COP-14) in order to establish who was attending these events and to what degree the formal negotiations were referred to. Our research at the UNFCCC meetings also involved interviews (#10) with NNSA representatives about what they were doing at the COP and why they attended; participant observation at key events hosted at or alongside the COP (e.g. Business Day in Bali); written commentaries by researchers attending COP-14 from Oxford ECI and the Tyndall Centre [#8], plus informal discussions with NNSAs at social events and in the corridors.

Our side event survey at COP-13 and COP-14 was designed to complement the wider Tyndall case studies we were engaged in at the time – on cities, offset organisations and corporations. Through the survey we were interested to establish in what ways participants at the side events were engaging with the main UN negotiations, and the survey questions were about the main topics addressed in the Side Event, levels of attendance, reference to the negotiations, the main discussion points, reference to science/knowledge (to IPCC, Stern Review, etc.), and ethical issues.

## 2 Conceptual Framework

### *2.1 Climate Governance beyond the Regime*

The climate change governance literature increasingly recognises that non-nation state actors (NNSAs) are visible and influential forces in the international climate regime and beyond (Okereke et al. 2009; Betsill and Bulkeley 2004, 2006; Gulbrandsen and Andresen 2004; Betsill and Corell 2001; Newell 2000; and Auer 2000). Parallel climate initiatives by NNSAs have mushroomed at all levels of governance and encompass a wide variety of actors ranging from small community groups to large multinational corporations. Their actions on climate change may have a material impact on the reduction of global greenhouse gas emissions and on the international climate negotiation process. According to Betsill and Corell (2008, p. 2), international negotiations cannot be understood merely as processes that involve only national governments, but as involving “myriad actors representing a diversity of interests”.

The vast majority of research on climate change governance has focused on the development of the international climate regime and its implementation with a focus on the nation-state (see Okereke et al. 2009); much less work has been done to understand the influence of NNSAs as well as the process of governing (Sending and Neumann 2006, p. 188). The literature on global governance has drawn attention to the multitude of actors who exert their impact on how climate change is addressed. Here, nation-states are generally seen as having the ultimate or sovereign authority and NNSAs as influencing state actors, rather than exercising agency in their own right (Auer 2000; Betsill and Bulkeley 2004). While this may be true in the international climate negotiations, examples abound where NNSAs are acting authoritatively and in their own right in the informal climate arena beyond the formal UNFCCC regime (Okereke 2008; Schroeder and Bulkeley 2009).

This paper takes a different approach, looking specifically at the role of NNSAs at what is the annual focal point of the formal UN climate regime, namely the Conference of the Parties (COP) meetings. We suggest it is a surprisingly under researched area, given the increasing popularity of COPs, with NNSAs attending in ever greater numbers. The work of Hjerpe et al. provides a rare example of Side Event COP research within political science. A survey by Hjerpe et al. (2008) on COP13 and COP14 side events summarised the six main functions of side events to include building capacity; introducing potential items for negotiations; interconnecting people and policy areas; disseminating information; providing a forum for

other levels of governance; and legitimising global governance. The research also revealed that about a quarter of Side Event attendees are negotiators or government representatives, many of them being from the G77 and China. The authors conclude importantly that the Side Events are not just a parallel world with little interaction between it and the formal sessions, but that they have an important capacity-building function as well given that every year a large number of participants attend the COP for the first time and use Side Events as a way to educate themselves about pertinent issues surrounding the climate change issue. (Hjierpe et al. 2008, Hierpe & Linnér fc)

Building on the research of Hjierpe et al.(2008) – and working alongside them at COP-13 and 14 - we have concentrated our research more closely on the topics of discussion at the Side Events, and the links drawn (or not) to the negotiations. Further, through interviews with selected NNSAs at the COPs, and drawing on other NNSA research from the wider Tyndall project, we have asked questions about what NNSA are hoping to achieve at the COPs, and what precisely they do whilst they are there. Before turning in detail to consider these questions, however, we briefly introduce aspects of the UNFCCC meetings and outline the range of possible activities NNSAs can engage in at the COPs, in order to situate the work being done at the Side Events.

## ***2.2 Ways of Influencing the UNFCCC Process at the COPs***

This study aims to analyse how NNSAs are seeking to influence the international climate negotiations. Using Betsill and Corell's (2008, p. 24) definition of influence, it "occurs when one actor intentionally communicates to another so as to alter the latter's behaviour from what would have occurred otherwise." Before proceeding to examine our COP survey results, we first briefly examine here the range of possible ways in which NNSAs can participate in the annual UNFCCC meeting, including both formal (organised and coordinated by the UNFCCC Secretariat) and informal (events held in parallel to the COP) avenues. The former includes Side Events, Speakers Corner, exhibitions and constituency group activity, while the later includes parallel events and trade fairs.

Under the UNFCCC and other multilateral environmental agreements, non-state actors can apply for 'observer status', allowing them to participate in a limited form in the UNFCCC negotiation and implementation processes. The UNFCCC (1992), in Article 7.6, establishes the mandate for the admission of observers as follows:

“Any body or agency, whether national or international, governmental or non-governmental, which is qualified in matters covered by the Convention, and which has informed the secretariat of its wish to be represented at a session of the Conference of the Parties as an observer, may be so admitted unless at least one third of the Parties present object. The admission and participation of observers shall be subject to the rules of procedure adopted by the Conference of the Parties”.

To acquire observer status under the UNFCCC, entities are required to submit to the Secretariat proof of their non-profit status and that their mandate, scope and organisational structure are ‘in harmony’ with the mission of the UNFCCC. This already exempts certain non-state actors, notably businesses, from acquiring observer status. The only way businesses can participate in the COP is by representation through not-for-profit business or trade associations, such as the International Emissions Trading Association (IETA), the World Business Council on Sustainable Development, the Pew Centre, The Climate Group or the former Global Climate Coalition (which disbanded in 2002).

There are a number of activities that observer organisations can undertake at the COPs, including: observing the official negotiations (where permitted, some sessions have restricted access), organising and participating in Side Events and parallel events (outside of official UN remit), hosting exhibits, as well as business-to-business meetings and informal discussions at the numerous social events. As outlined, our research concentrated on the official UNFCCC Side Events, but it is instructive to put this particular area of NNSA activity in context.

### **2.2.1 Side Events**

Side Events are short showcases or debates led by observer organisations, intergovernmental organisations and national governments on their climate change initiatives or results. Side Events are organised by the UNFCCC Secretariat, and it is highly competitive to obtain a Side Event slot, with only a limited number of 1.5 or 2-hour sessions available each day (up until recently timed to coincide with breaks in the formal negotiations and now expanded into formal session slots as well). After receiving a record of 350 applications for Side Events for COP14 in 2008, this figure was surpassed for COP15 in 2009 with 540 applications for an initial 136 slots, which the UNFCCC Secretariat subsequently increased to 200 slots to accommodate for the increase in demand.<sup>1</sup>

While there are evidently a number of types of engagement, the official UN Side Events at the Conferences of the Parties (COPs) are arguably the most important and visible. Side Events provide a forum for interaction among national delegates and intergovernmental and observer organisation representatives and the media. Side Events are covered daily by a publication called the *Earth Negotiations Bulletin on the Side (ENBOTS)* - as are the official UNFCCC sessions by the *ENB* - a service provided by the International Institute of Sustainable Development (IISD). Side Events and exhibits were originally established by the UNFCCC Secretariat as a forum for observer organisations “to highlight diverse climate change issues in a different environment from the negotiation process itself”.<sup>2</sup> Side Events are conventionally held in the form of a panel of presenters on a common theme featuring presenters from different organisations or from a single Party, IGO or NGO showcasing their activities or results. Some Side Event organisers invite discussants, which may represent a different constituency, to provide their perspectives or feedback. Side Events usually end with a Q&A session to engage the audience. While Side Events were held in a different venue to the formal sessions at COP-13 in Bali (separate hotels requiring taking a shuttle back and forth) and thereby perceived more strongly as a different ‘universe’ (Lovell 2007), they were closer in proximity again in Poznan.

The role and scope of Side Events are still developing. Our informal conversations/interview at COP-14 with the people with responsibility in the UNFCCC Secretariat for organising Side Events revealed how the UNFCCC Secretariat manages the growing interest among delegations, intergovernmental organizations and NGOs in organizing Side Events in a context of limited space and resources is a pressing challenge. The Secretariat gravitates between being a clearing house for any kind of information relating to climate change and a more carefully screened selection of relevant and quality information relating more narrowly to the UNFCCC process. Hjerpe et al. (2008) suggest further upgrading civil society input into the UNFCCC process by increasing reporting on Side Events and channelling information and insights into the formal sessions.

### **2.2.2 Speakers Corner**

Due to the unprecedented demand for holding Side Events, the UNFCCC Secretariat has introduced in 2009 a new channel of communication, the “...inSide climate change” Solutions. According to the UNFCCC website, this is “a Speakers’ Corner-like concept that provides an opportunity for applicants to be interviewed briefly by a professional journalist

on actions, solutions, observations and issues that impact on climate change. All interviews are filmed, edited and broadcast on Climate Change TV, the world's first Internet broadcaster dedicated entirely to climate change issues. Interviews will be catalogued in a fully searchable database alongside other interviews with world leaders, expert observers, decision makers and activists in the international climate change debate".<sup>3</sup>

### **2.2.3 Exhibit booths**

The government hosting a COP provides exhibit booths for Parties, UN and observer organisations to showcase their work at UNFCCC sessions. The exhibition area at COP-15 in Copenhagen will include over 190 exhibits, which will be on display throughout the duration of the two-week conference. COP participants submit requests for exhibit space to the UNFCCC Secretariat. If their submission is confirmed, they may use this space to showcase or disseminate information on their climate related activities and findings. Booths are usually located in central corridors or halls where many conference participants pass through and therefore provide further opportunities for networking and exchanging word-of-mouth information.

### **2.2.4 Constituency Group**

A further way in which NNSAs are active at the COPs is through their relevant constituency group. Since the beginning of the UNFCCC process, business, industry and the environmental organizations have proactively created channels of communication with the Secretariat and the Parties. This has resulted in the recognition of "constituencies", which are loose groups of likeminded organisations, somewhat similar in nature to the negotiating coalitions that have been formed by countries (Depledge 2005, p. 214-216). The secretariat now interacts with constituency chairs or focal points.

The two first constituencies were the business and industry non-governmental organizations (BINGO) and the environmental non-governmental organizations (ENGO), dating back to before the Convention was adopted in 1992. Other constituencies have been formed and recognized since, including the local government and municipal authorities (LGMA) at COP-1, the indigenous peoples organizations (IPO) at COP-7, the research and independent non-governmental organizations (RINGO) at COP-9, and the trade union non-governmental organizations (TUNGO) at COP-14. Three provisional constituencies to be reviewed for formal recognition at COP-17 include farmers, women and gender, and youth (YOUNGO)

(UNFCCC 2009). Some organizations such as faith groups and parliamentarians currently remain outside these broad groupings.

Participation in a particular constituency is neither official nor binding, but is the choice of an individual organization to do so.<sup>4</sup> The constituency focal points facilitate the exchange of information between the secretariat and the admitted observer organizations. Constituencies may hold their own meetings, which may be closed, in which they may exchange views and information or develop strategies of exerting influence. Each constituency is also allocated time to make formal interventions and statements in the plenaries of the various bodies, including the COP, the COP serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol (COP/MOP or CMP), the Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI) and the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA). Finally, they can provide formal input into the negotiating process through submission of their positions to the secretariat.<sup>5</sup>

### 2.2.5 Parallel Events

Observer organizations can also host and participate in so-called ‘parallel events’, outside of the official remit of the UNFCCC. This has become increasingly popular with significant numbers of parallel events taking place alongside the official sessions of the COP and its various bodies. See Table 1 for examples of parallel events held at COP-14.

Table 1: Examples of ‘parallel’ events held at COP-14

Event	Organiser(s)	Date	No. of people	Stated purpose
Development and Climate Days	IIED, IISD, Stockholm Environment Institute, RING alliance of policy research organisations	6th-7th Dec	c.300	“The event was held in the context of a growing call for knowledge sharing on the links between climate change and development, to provide a platform for individuals and organizations working on the issues of development and climate change to exchange experiences, share the latest science and best practices, and promote linkages between development and climate change.” ( <a href="http://www.iisd.ca/download/pdf/sd/yimbvol99num5e.pdf">http://www.iisd.ca/download/pdf/sd/yimbvol99num5e.pdf</a> )
Forest Day	(CIFOR), the Government of Poland and the Collaborative Partnership on Forests	6th & 8th Dec	c.900	“...to facilitate discussions on the potential to incorporate forests into climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies at both the global and national level.” ( <a href="http://www.iisd.ca/climate/cop14/fd/">http://www.iisd.ca/climate/cop14/fd/</a> )
Business Day	WBCSD & the International Chamber of Commerce	9th Dec	c.200	“to... demonstrate the capacities and commitments of leading companies and business sectors to provide solutions to the climate challenge, and highlight the policies and financing requirements that will enable companies and markets to successfully develop and disseminate the technologies and practices required by an ambitious

				global mitigation plan.” ( <a href="http://www.poznanbusinessday.org/">http://www.poznanbusinessday.org/</a> )
Local Government Climate Sessions	ICLEI (Local Governments for Sustainability)	9th-11th Dec	c.400	“Local governments have sent a clear message to the national governments that they want their role recognized as necessary partners to address climate change.” ( <a href="http://www.iclei.org/index.php?id=8883">http://www.iclei.org/index.php?id=8883</a> )
Econcern Sustainable Energy Event	Econcern	1st - 12th Dec	-	“It provides an inspiring platform for politicians, business people and representatives of the media who are interested in finding practical solutions that will help achieve the ambitious climate change goals discussed at the Conference.” ( <a href="http://www.cop14poznan.com/index.php?option=com_frontpage&amp;Itemid=1">http://www.cop14poznan.com/index.php?option=com_frontpage&amp;Itemid=1</a> )

## 2.2.6 Trade Fairs

Trade fairs are an informal way of 'show and tell', which are organised independently of the UNFCCC Secretariat. They are mainly hosted by businesses or business or trade associations who rent space closeby the COP venue to showcase their recent technological developments or demonstrate their new products protecting the global climate. An example of a trade fair at COP-14 in Poznan was the "Technologies for Climate Protection" show comprising around 120 of the most original devices and installations from 20 countries. Climate protection technologies - such as cutting-edge hydrogen-powered solutions, energy-efficient cars and eco-friendly insulating materials - were displayed on an area of 7 thousand square metres.

### 2.2.6 Other Modes of Influence

There are also more informal yet perhaps equally important ways of influencing the UNFCCC process. They include lobbying delegates (through setting up meetings or chatting informally at social events and in the corridors), disseminating information material and talking to the media. Another way of impacting the process is by being on a national delegation. Delegation size and composition differs significantly among countries and has evolved through time. In general, they tend to be composed mainly of civil servants, but there are no rules as to who may or is required to be included in a delegation, and sometimes non-governmental people are included. For many years, international lawyers from FIELD have negotiated on behalf of small-island states (Oberthuer and Ott 1999, p. 31) Local government representatives are currently lobbying for a COP decision to strengthen recognition of their role in addressing climate change by requiring their representation on national delegations.<sup>6</sup>

### 3 Findings

In this main empirical section we look at two key questions: first, to what extent do side events speak to the formal UNFCCC negotiations? And second, why do participants attend Side Events? These questions are answered using a mix of quantitative and qualitative data from COP-13 (Bali) and COP-14 (Poznan).

Table 2: Reference to UNFCCC negotiations at Side Events – COP-13 and COP-14

<b>Reference to UNFCCC negotiations</b>	<b>COP-13</b>	<b>COP-14</b>
yes	33 (59%)	44 (77%)
No	13 (23%)	5 (9%)
Not explicitly	10 (18%)	8 (14%)

The key point to draw from Table 2 is that an unexpectedly high proportion of Side Events did not directly refer to the UN negotiations at all (41% at COP-13; 23% at COP-14). Given that Side Events are aimed at informing and feeding into the UN negotiations this is surprising. It is particularly surprising given the length of Side Events (1.5 or 2 hrs). More reference to the UNFCCC negotiations was made at COP-14 in Poznan, and this is to be expected given greater proximity to significant round of (post-2012) negotiations at COP-15.

We used the survey data to examine in more detail what particular aspects of the negotiations were referred to in Side Events where they were discussed. This data is shown in Table 3. It is revealed that in Bali at COP-13 the issue of REDD was most commonly raised with reference to the negotiations. In Poznan at COP-14 interestingly it was the nature of the negotiation process that was most discussed.

Table 3: Type of reference made to negotiations in Side Events – COP-13 and COP-14

<b>Reference to negotiations</b>	<b>Bali (COP-13)</b>	<b>Poznan (COP-14)</b>
Adaptation/adaptation fund	3	5
CDM	2	7
REDD	8	7
Finance & technology	1	4
targets & timetables, commitments	1	3
nature of process	2	10
other, e.g. NNSA action	2	9
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>45</b>

We also examined in greater detail the most well-attended Side Events at COP-13 and COP-14 (with over 150 participants for COP-13 and over 100 for COP-14), to see what topics were discussed, and assess whether these popular Side Events had more direct linkages to key topics at the negotiations. Tables 4 and 5 show survey data on the most well-attended side event title, organiser, attendance level, and degree of reference to the negotiations. The main focus of the popular COP-13 events can be summarised as follows: post-2012 (5); development (3); REDD (2); and science (2). For COP-14, they were REDD (4) and architecture and process (2), followed by technology, finance, businesses, US policy, CDM and EU-ETS (1 each).

Table 4: Topics addressed at most popular side events at COP-13

<b>Title of side event</b>	<b>Date / time</b>	<b>Organisers</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Main topics addressed</b>	<b>Reference to the negotiations</b>
NGO Bali Mandate	04-Dec-07 13:00	Climate Action Network International	250+	Post-2012 regime; adaptation in post-2012 framework; REDD; expansion of LULUCF e.g. to mining, peat management; role of the US	Yes; call for negotiators to recognise the need for large and rapid changes; need to view adaptation as a 'building block'; US roles and opinions at the meeting are irrelevant
Architecture for agreement: Issues and options for post-2012 international climate change policy	10-Dec-07 15:30	Harvard University	250	Policy infrastructure instead of goals; market-based policy instruments; fairness - developing countries, trade, adaptation; key nations involvement; bottom up vs. top down approaches	Yes; little - presentation of work/results/recommendations
Linkages among emissions trading schemes and offset projects	04-Dec-07 18:00	Climate Strategies (European Research Organisation)	250	Legal issues in linking; New Zealand trading scheme; CERs serving as credible currency for linking trading schemes; controlling the price or linking up?; how to break linkages	No
Putting people first: Climate action for development	10-Dec-07 13:00	World Bank	200+	Impacts of climate change on world's poorest; climate defining human development in 21st century; international cooperation on climate change integral to peaceful sustainable development; need to have negotiations and make decisions on adaptation now	Yes; inconceivable that Bali will end without a mandate for future emissions reductions; need for cooperation between all sectors; negotiations are complex; need to agree today to avoid gap between 2012 and 2nd compliance period
Business and government leaders pair up to discuss a post-2012 climate architecture	11-Dec-07 13:00	World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD)	200	business role in negotiations and tackling climate change more generally; creating a global carbon market; post-2012 options (e.g sectoral CDM); businesses trying to influence governments to take more stringent climate change regulations (helps investment)	that the negotiations can be difficult to access; the importance of involving developing countries

High conservation value (HCV) forests and land use planning for REDD	06-Dec-07 18:00	World Wildlife Fund	200	High conservation value framework; need for national interpretation for each HCVF definition; Two uses of this framework (1) allow project scale risk management (2) national/regional scale planning and prioritisation	Not really
US Action - carbon markets and policy	06-Dec-07 13:00	Business Council for Sustainable Energy (BCSE)	150	current bills/proposed legislation to reduce GHG emissions in the US; individual state standards; corporate sales pitches; US carbon markets	businesses wanting a strong message from Bali; BCSE want a legally-binding post 2012 framework as an outcome from Bali
Biodiversity - climate interactions: adaptation, mitigation and human livelihoods	06-Dec-07 15:30	UK Royal Society	150	Interconnectedness of biodiversity and climate change issues; importance of biodiversity as a buffer; holistic perspective i.e. negative side effects; resilience/collapse of terrestrial and marine ecosystems; (limited) capacity of ecosystems to adapt;	Yes; stated desire to impact on negotiations
Financing for development – Climate and Development Day	08-Dec-07	IIED/IISD	150	National funding and policy for climate adaptation; international finance for national and local climate adaptation; donor co-ordination; raising international finance	Yes; adaptation fund (governance)
Land use, climate and development: understanding the linkages and finding solutions	05-Dec-07	World Resources Institute	150	Need to make REDD work; need to assure “real reductions” and not undermine mitigation efforts; ensure permanence of credits; solution will build capacity and governance structures, protect sustainable livelihoods and create demand-side policies	Yes; described the state of forest monitoring and their preferred REDD mechanism
Cornerstone of future climate regime from a scientific perspective	12-Dec-07	Germany	150+	German integrated climate program as realistic not idealistic; climate policy as an opportunity not a burden - precondition of economic success in the future; summary of measures (win-win-win-win situation)	Yes; Germany's trust in the Bali negotiations; need for action now

Table 5: Topics addressed at most popular side events at COP-14

Title of Side Event	Date/Time	Organisers	Participants	Main Topics Addressed	Reference to the Negotiations
Technology Development and Deployment to address Climate Change	08-Dec-08 13:00	International Chamber of Commerce (ICC)	100-110	Challenge presented by increasing energy demand and the need to improve energy access, and the need to respond to GHG risk; need for innovative technology and improved technology transfer; Ecomagination initiative to improve environmental performance	-
US Update on Federal Affairs	09-Dec-08 15:00	Environmental Defense Fund, PEW, IETA	150	How the US regulatory and political environment surrounding climate change policy is changing as a result of the transition to a new US administration; commitment of US legislators to make progress on climate change under the new administration	Little mention; US focused; stated that the new US administration is very keen to engage more meaningfully with the international community on climate change in comparison to the outgoing administration
Architectures for Agreement: Interim Report of the Harvard Project on International Climate Agreements	06-Dec-08 18:00	Harvard University	200	Background to Harvard project looking at post-2012 agreements and launch of the interim report; key principles for a new international climate agreement; possible architectures at a more detailed level - targets, timetables, policies etc	Theoretical; based on underlying principles not actual negotiations taking place
UN System Response to Support REDD	04-Dec-08	United Nations (UNEP and UNFCCC)	250	Status of REDD – on the ground and in negotiations; how to get REDD operational e.g. UN-REDD Work Plan; experiences of selected developing countries	Yes - lots; timing of the negotiations - how timing is tight and need to get REDD up and running
CDM Methodologies - Existing and Emerging Approaches; And PoA - Opportunities and Challenges	03-Dec-08 13:00	UNFCCC	150-200	Upcoming CDM issues - expansion of the CDM Program of Activities (PoA), incorporation of energy efficiency into CDM; different types of CDM methodologies; process of refining and modifying specific CDM methodologies	No
REDD Demonstration Projects: Principles, Standards &	05-Dec-08	Fauna & Flora International	120	REDD principles; importance of multiple benefits and robust standards for effective REDD; Makira Forest Project, Madagascar; forest carbon financing for conservation, climate	No

Methodologies	15:30			change mitigation etc; ecosystem restoration, Sumatra; forest carbon market	
The Business Contribution to a Copenhagen Agreement	05-Dec-08 13:00	World Business Council for Sustainable Development	150	Significant contribution business has to make; level of emission reductions	Yes; a few key decisions made could provide the momentum required for a successful agreement at Copenhagen
Growing Together in a Changing Climate	05-Dec-08 13:00	Secretariat of the UNFCCC	170	Role of youth groups; vulnerable groups worldwide who don't have a formal voice at COP-14; digital divide between North and South on awareness issues; local level awareness as a way to mitigate climate change	Yes; consensus that there needs to be a two level approach to climate policy outside national government action at the supranational and subnational level
Financing Action on Climate Change: Needs, Priorities as if the Development Crisis Matters	04-Dec-08 18:00	Oxfam International	100+	Adaptation finance; impacts of climate change; adaptation strategies; World Bank pilot project for climate resilience; unresolved questions that prevent the development of institutional architecture; commitments and certified emissions reductions	Yes; adaptation fund discussions; anticipation of sufficient attention being given to negotiations at COP13
REDD and the EU Emissions Trading System	08-Dec-08 15:00	Institut du développement durable et des relations internationales (IDDRI)	100+	EU Energy package – revision of EUETS; opportunities in the forest sector for emissions mitigation; challenges at the policy and methodological level; potential of market approaches; social implications of REDD; REDD and views of New Zealand government	Not explicitly
Global REDD Architecture: Options for Integrating REDD into the Global Climate Regime	06-Dec-08 11:00	Centre for Int. Forest Research (CIFOR), ICRAF	100+	Three 'I's' - incentives, information & institutional design; immediate and effectiveness of REDD reductions; high option value of protecting forests due to the irreversibility of deforestation; importance of independent audit; costs effectiveness of REDD	Yes; negotiators in a hurry to find a deal; warned against rushing the process suggesting a “phased, coordinated approach with safeguard mechanisms”

The main points to take from Tables 4 and 5 are that REDD was a key issue at Bali, as one might expect given that COP13 was held in Indonesia, a country whose key negotiating issue is REDD. This suggests there are close linkages between Side Events and negotiations, at least on certain topics. REDD was also a key issue at Poznan, which confirms the high level of interest this issue continues to receive as the design of the REDD mechanism is being developed and negotiated. Development was also popular at Bali, for similar reasons of Indonesian and regional interest. Attention on questions of architecture and process was also strong in Poznan.

In terms of speaking to the negotiations, those Side Event presenters who did so at both COP-13 and COP-14 stressed the need for cooperation, agreement or action now and for key decisions to be made in a timely manner. But one Side Event participant called for a ‘phased, coordinated approach with safeguard mechanisms’. The role of other stakeholders, including youth and those at supranational and subnational levels, was also emphasized.

There are several reasons to be cautious about the survey data: in particular Side Event attendance was affected by a range of non-content factors such as time of day, availability of refreshments, and other conflicting events timetabled at the same time. For this reason we complemented our survey with more qualitative research methods, including a number of interviews with NNSAs at the COPs, and also participant observation and commentary by an extended group of researchers attending the COPs from Oxford ECI and the Tyndall Centre.

The interviews and participant observations revealed a number of additional issues. First, it was clear that NNSA felt there was a different dynamic to the formal UNFCCC negotiations and the Side Events. The Side Events were seen by interviewees as solutions-focused, with vigorous debate about new ideas for mitigating climate change, as well as presentation of the latest climate science. The negotiations, on the other hand, were seen as less about climate science and more about negotiating skills, vested interests and political power, as one interviewee commented:

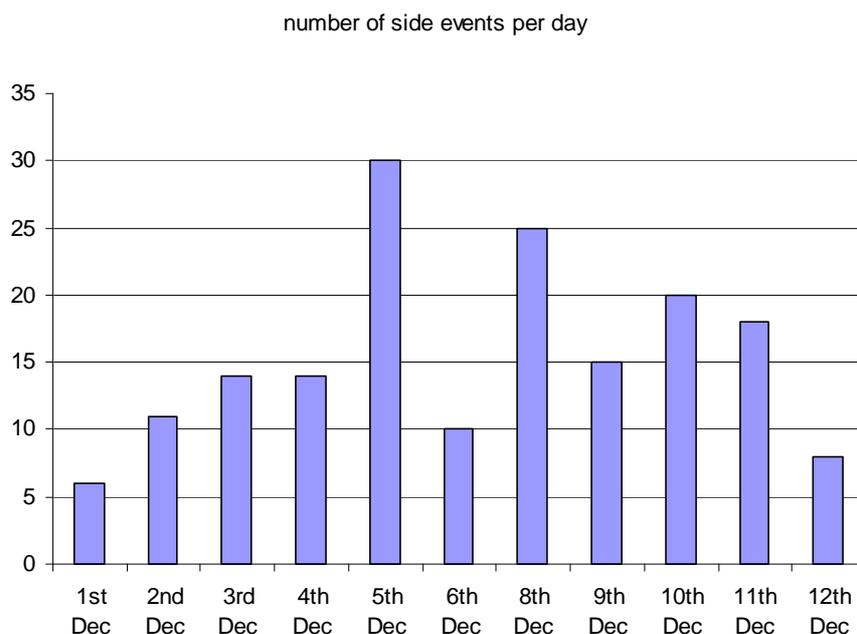
“... any international agreement is like a 180-piece puzzle, because you have to get 180 countries to agree. It is always watered down from what we actually need to tackle climate change... it will always be behind the science...” (NNSA – Director of Policy & Regulation, Bali COP, December 2007).

The majority of NNSAs interviewed saw themselves and other NNSAs as quicker and more effective at dealing with climate change than nation-states. In the second week of COP-13 at Bali for instance, when progress with the negotiations appeared to have stalled, NNSAs as well as national governments at the Side Events became increasingly vocal about the need for action on climate change. Their argument was that if stringent greenhouse gas targets were not going to

emerge through the international regime then climate action should be taken using other avenues, i.e. through business initiatives, partnerships between local authorities etc. – topics of discussion prevalent at the Side Events

Following on from this, our second finding from the interviews and participant observation was that some NNSAs evidently use the COP as a convenient location for discussions and meetings with other NNSAs. For example, there was a Bali Business Day event organised by the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) during the second week of the COP which was purely for business-to-business discussions; as the Director of the WBCSD explained “we don’t have a good voice at the COPs and wanted to organise a specific day”. For many non-state actors the value of the COP is the convenience of having over ten thousand people working on climate science and policy in one place at the same time; it is a huge networking opportunity. In this sense the formal UN climate negotiations are a ‘side event’: they are not necessarily directly relevant to non-state actors except as a way of bringing the large international community of people working on climate change together. It was evident at COP-13 and COP-14 that a lot of businesses and NGOs left the COP before it finished: by the middle of the 2nd week the number of participants at Side Events had substantially declined, indicating their primary interest was not in the end result of the negotiations. This pattern of peak attendance is reflected in Figure 3 illustrating the number of Side Events held per day at COP-14; there is a peak in the number of Side Events around the middle weekend of the two-week COP.

Figure 3: Number of side events held per day at COP-14 in Poznan



Source: data derived from UNFCCC website - <http://unfccc.int> - and compiled by authors

A third and related finding was that our interviews identified that a key reason for NNSAs attending the COPs is to be visible and raise their profile: it is first and foremost a networking opportunity. As one interviewee explained in the aftermath of Bali, when asked about his reasons for attending:

“I went there [the Bali 2007 COP] so I could meet loads of people in one go. It’s like a club... it is like meeting someone in a first-class lounge club - ‘Oh, right, you’re a first-class’ - you know, once you are in you’re one of the global elite of ten thousand of them in the world in the international climate change elite club. And once you are in you are part of it – you are there. If you are just somebody sitting in an office in Australia you’re nobody. So this is why you go to those things.” (Interview, Manager – NNSA, Feb 2008)

Fourth, we found, however, that COPs are not always an effective venue for NNSAs and that not all stakeholders are equal in the UNFCCC process. Although the large majority of NNSAs we spoke to viewed the COP as a worthwhile event, some concerns were voiced about the way in which the participation of the private sector is limited at COPs. For example, as discussed businesses are not officially able to obtain a pass to attend the COPs according to UN rules because observers have to share the UNFCCC mission of mitigating climate change, which businesses often do not. Business attendees therefore need to secure passes through other routes, typically trade associations. When asked about how businesses seek to influence the negotiations and decision making at the COP one interviewee replied “it is all pretty much informal chats... unfortunately there is no formal channel for the private sector to voice their concerns directly to the president of the COP”.<sup>7</sup> While it is accepted that a political framework is important in formal negotiations and countries need to push their own agendas, NNSAs should have more of a voice in the negotiation process. The question is to what degree these voices filter up from informal activities to the formal negotiations whether through protests by NGOs, observers lobbying party leaders, Side Events attended by Party members, subsidiary group statements, or through observer groups’ statements. Although some members of delegations are actively attending Side Events – according to Hjierpe et al. (2008) 25% - the interaction seems to be quite limited. Attending the negotiations one realises how difficult it is to make progress, while at the Side Events many people are aware of the need to act effectively as soon as possible and propose solutions. Non-nation-state actors (NGOs and industry associations, but especially businesses and local governments) apply important pressure on governments but it does not seem like they can be very effective during the negotiations. Probably most of their influence on the negotiations happens before and not at the COP. On a practical matter, interviewees also commented how it can be difficult to organise meetings and co-ordinate staff, which relates in part to the informal nature of COP activities, and to the growing size of COPs.

One interviewee suggested that attending Side Events might not be the most efficient use of resources for their company, explaining "...Side Events are one avenue where we want to influence, where we want to be present and to learn... but I know the network, I know the people, it would be just as efficient to have a few staff with clear messages going to the individual people who are key players." Further, for many non-state actors international climate policy is just one focus of their activity; work in mitigating climate change takes place year-round across a range of private and public arenas.

## **4 Conclusion**

NNSA participation in the UNFCCC process has emerged gradually by way of establishing practice, rather than by formalizing rules of participation. There are clearly a number of ways NNSAs can engage with nation-states and other NNSAs at the COPs. Our observations of the formal (negotiations) and informal (Side Events) arenas at COP-13 and COP-14 suggest that the interactions between these bodies were quite variable. Factors such as the organization responsible for organizing the Side Events and the international versus domestic relevance of the topic being addressed may have played a role determining the level of interaction between the formal and informal spaces at COP-14. Some Side Events made frequent reference to the negotiation process, while others were seemingly unrelated to the formal processes of the COP. Some of the Side Events which did not make frequent or specific reference to the current negotiations included discussions of particular nation-state domestic climate policy. However, were many Side Events which were entirely focussed on the central issues in the negotiations process such as CDM, REDD, adaptation, financing, technology transfer, etc. In some respects the activities of NNSAs blur the lines of the formal and informal arenas of the UNFCCC process, and this relationship is changing over time.

We suggest that questions regarding the 'value added' of the COPs for NNSAs and what could be done to strengthen it need to be more openly discussed and evaluated. Side Events clearly facilitate informal negotiations between delegates, academics and civil society. The Side Events where delegates spoke at were regarded as especially valuable as they produced the greatest level of debate and most provocative questions and responses. To further strengthen this exchange and debate among stakeholders, future COPs could group Side Events together to create large presenting blocks to facilitate communication among presenters of related approaches. Alternatively, issue area overview Side Events could be organized to bridge the gaps between approaches. They create an extremely rich learning environment for those able to attend a series of

Side Events, offering a unique opportunity to gather all the latest thinking on a topic. Unfortunately, this is not available to negotiators, who will have to continue to rely on quick summaries of main points, if they are following the Side Events at all.

Side Events are an effective forum to exchange ideas and network but it does not offer a framework to build a coordinated agenda between the work of non-state actors and the UNFCCC process. The increasing impacts associated with climate change will incentivise more and more non-state actors to take actions to mitigate or adapt to climate change. The UNFCCC needs to look for innovative ideas on how to integrate more actively non-state actors into the new climate change regime.

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# Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Letter by UNFCCC Secretariat sent to all Designated Focal Points of admitted observer organizations, dated 25 November 2009, on file with authors.

<sup>2</sup> See: [http://unfccc.int/meetings/cop\\_15/side\\_events\\_exhibits/items/5095.php](http://unfccc.int/meetings/cop_15/side_events_exhibits/items/5095.php) (accessed November 2009).

<sup>3</sup> See: [http://unfccc.int/meetings/cop\\_15/side\\_events\\_exhibits/items/5095.php](http://unfccc.int/meetings/cop_15/side_events_exhibits/items/5095.php) (accessed November 2009).

<sup>4</sup> See: [http://unfccc.int/files/parties\\_and\\_observers/ngo/application/pdf/const.pdf](http://unfccc.int/files/parties_and_observers/ngo/application/pdf/const.pdf) (accessed September 2009).

<sup>5</sup> See: [http://unfccc.int/parties\\_observers/ngo/submissions/items/3689.php](http://unfccc.int/parties_observers/ngo/submissions/items/3689.php) (accessed September 2009) for examples of recent submissions.

<sup>6</sup> See: <http://www.iclei.org/index.php?id=9761#c37037> (accessed September 2009).

<sup>7</sup> But they can submit their views, see [http://unfccc.int/parties\\_and\\_observers/ngo/items/3689.php](http://unfccc.int/parties_and_observers/ngo/items/3689.php)