

# THE REGIONAL CLIMATE CHANGE NODES IN COLOMBIA

REAL PRACTICE IN COLLABORATIVE CLIMATE ACTION



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## ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

<b>CAR</b>	Regional Autonomous Corporation – Environmental Authority
<b>CICC</b>	Inter-sectoral Commission on Climate Change
<b>UNFCCC</b>	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
<b>CONPES</b>	National Council for Economic and Social Policy
<b>NPD</b>	National Planning Department
<b>GHG</b>	Greenhouse Gas
<b>IDEAM</b>	Colombian Institute of Hydrology, Meteorology and Environmental Studies
<b>Nodes</b>	Regional Climate Change Nodes
<b>NPD</b>	National Planning Department
<b>CCCMP</b>	Comprehensive Climate Change Management Plans
<b>RAP</b>	Administrative Planning Regions
<b>SISCLIMA</b>	National Climate Change System
<b>V-LED</b>	Vertical Integration and Learning for Low-Emission Development



# SUMMARY

Colombia's Regional Climate Change Nodes (hereinafter 'Nodes') are the country's flagship regional governance mechanisms to deliver climate change policy that integrates the responses by different levels of government. The Nodes have been in operation for ten years and were institutionalised by national Decree in 2016<sup>1</sup> in nine regions across Colombia's territory. The same Decree also established the national Intersectoral Climate Change Commission.

Currently, each of the nine Nodes is at a unique stage of development. Some, like the *Eje Cafetero* Node, have strong foundations and have been able to secure finance for their climate change projects. **While the Nodes have great potential to deliver on the promise to advance concerted climate solutions by different government levels and actors, they are currently not achieving a transformative impact due to a number of barriers.**

**2020 is a crucial year for the Nodes.** The Colombian Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development (MinAmbiente) is developing new regulations that are **essential in shaping the future of climate governance in the country.** This case study offers insight into the Nodes' practical experiences and offers recommendations to guide the regulatory process in 2020.



## RELEVANCE

The Colombian Climate Change Nodes are an interesting model for countries seeking to facilitate multi-stakeholder climate change planning in the regions, and to implement coherent regional and national climate action strategies. This model is especially relevant in countries with heterogeneous, (semi) autonomous regions.



## VISION

The Nodes aim to promote and accompany the implementation of climate change policies, strategies, plans and actions in each of the nine regions. Their key envisioned role is to coordinate between national, regional and local institutions. The composition of each Node is a unique combination of governmental and non-governmental institutions that are key in each region and that reflect its idiosyncrasy.

For example, the North Pacific Node is composed mainly of public entities (Regional Autonomous Corporations, a Regional Research Institute and representatives of the municipalities) and civil society stakeholders that are critical in the region (such as indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities). The *Eje Cafetero* Node, on the other hand, comprises several private-sector actors (such as the association of milk producers and public services companies), as well as NGOs, academia, and public agencies from different government levels.



## PRACTICE

The Nodes have a series of key functions and operating principles:

- Bringing together Colombian Departments that share hydrological, ecosystem, climatological, as well as socioeconomic and geopolitical characteristics, into one supra-Departmental entity.
- Joining diverse actors from the government, private, academic, and civil society sectors.
- Establishing their own operating regulations, as well as an action plan for a period of four years.
- Voluntary participation and funding.

<sup>1</sup> Government of Colombia (2016b).



### KEY ACTORS

- Regional Autonomous Corporations.
  - Departmental governments.
  - Municipalities.
  - The Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development, the National Planning Department (NPD) and sectoral ministries.
  - Research institutes that generate information for decision makers.
  - National Natural Parks of Colombia (PNNC) and Territorial Risk Management Councils.
- Representatives from academia, civil society, ethnic groups, and the private sector.



### VALUE & OUTCOME

The Nodes are an attempt to create a space at the regional level that integrates stakeholders from different sectors relevant to tackling climate change, in this way forming a strong territorial counterpart to the national level. One additional key outcome sought by the Nodes is unlocking information exchange between the various levels of government.

This undertaking aims for the territorial ownership of national strategies and initiatives to mitigate and adapt to climate change in such a diverse country. However, the Nodes have not yet delivered this vision in its entirety. The national government is currently considering regulatory reforms to increase their effectiveness.



### CHALLENGES & RECOMMENDATIONS

The scope of several Nodes does not always cater to the unique conditions and vision of each particular region. Despite the progress achieved on climate policy at the national level and in some Colombian regions, information transfer between different levels of government and real representation of regional and local priorities at the national level are still insufficient. Nodes are assigned functions, but lack the necessary autonomous financial management, human resources and support needed to succeed in these functions. Often, political will from key heads of department and other high-level decision makers at the regional and local levels is lacking.

The last section of this study offers detailed recommendations on financial and human resources, an enabling framework for the Nodes' power and impact, a readjustment of selected Nodes' scope and governance, and subnational political will.



### REPLICATION

The Nodes started as a self-organised pilot in the Colombian *Eje Cafetero* region and have been replicated in further regions. The Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development undertook the initiative of dividing the remaining national territory into eight different regions for this purpose.

Replicating the exercise in other countries should always go hand in hand with a deep understanding of the Colombian context, challenges and lessons learned. Concrete allocation of resources and political backing are essential factors and requirements for institutional and operational success.



### KEY RESOURCES

Colombian SISCLIMA Decree (Decree 298 of 2016): Access the resource [here](#)

Colombian Climate Change Policy, 2017: Access the resource [here](#)

Colombian Climate Change Regional Nodes Guide, 2013: Access the resource [here](#)

Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development: Access the resource [here](#)

Colombia's Third National Communication on Climate Change to the UNFCCC, 2017: Access the resource [here](#)

## ABOUT THE V-LED REAL PRACTICE SERIES ON COLLABORATIVE CLIMATE ACTION

We believe that local governments are crucial to addressing climate change. As frontline responders, they create sustainable development pathways and opportunities for resilient communities. The climate actions of cities and regions are vital to pioneering transformative decarbonisation processes and achieving the objectives of the Paris Agreement, but we must join forces across governing levels to scale up efforts and bring successful initiatives to scale.

The V-LED *Real Practice* series responds to the growing demand for real-life examples and practical knowledge about multi-level climate governance. The series answers the question: How have local and national governments addressed challenges in their collaborative climate actions? By delving into the details of practical initiatives, examining the challenges they face and highlighting key lessons for replication, the series extends knowledge to policy makers and implementers in order to improve collaborative action among local, national and global actors.

The *Real Practices* from Kenya, South Africa, the Philippines and Colombia are produced by the V-LED project. Visit [www.localclimateaction.org](http://www.localclimateaction.org) to learn more.

**A note on terminology:** The V-LED *Real Practice* Series discusses the relationship between the *national* government sitting in a country's capital and the *subnational* government in that country. Subnational government entities govern at levels that are closer to the people—these are (1) the regional level (Colombian Departments) and (2) the local level (municipalities, cities and ethnic entities). The terminology in Colombia is unique, as 'territorial' is a widespread term that encompasses the regional and local levels. In this study you will sometimes encounter this term. Colombia's regional level consists of 32 Departments, and its local level consists of 1124 municipalities, a Capital District, and 773 indigenous reserves.





# BACKGROUND

For more than 10 years, Colombia has faced the challenge of designing and implementing national climate change policies, plans and strategies in a coherent way throughout its diverse regions. National policy has sought to capture information and data at the territorial scale and establish cross-sectoral conversations on sustainable development and climate change governance. In order to integrate regional and local governing actors into national efforts to mitigate and adapt to climate change, the national government established Regional Climate Change Nodes (hereinafter 'Nodes'). The Nodes are regional bodies entrusted with bringing together relevant actors in each region to advance climate change initiatives, strategies, plans, programmes, and projects.

Colombia is a large and diverse country. It is divided into 32 Departments, with 1124 municipalities and a Capital District, and has 773 indigenous reserves.<sup>2</sup> There are also Collective Afro-Colombian Territories, located mostly on the Colombian Pacific Coast, which in 2006 encompassed more than 5 million hectares of titled land.<sup>3</sup>

Most of Colombia's emissions (55%) come from the AFOLU sector (Agriculture, Forestry, and other Land uses).<sup>4</sup> The main climate impacts expected in the country are a rise in sea levels, the accelerated melting of snow-capped mountains and glaciers, loss of moors, and an increased incidence of extreme weather events. Shifts in average precipitation (significant increases and decreases) are also expected in 27% of the national territory.<sup>5</sup>

According to the Third National Communication on Climate Change, the country ranks 33rd globally in terms of vulnerability. Virtually the entire territory faces risks presented by climate change (Figure 2) due to pre-existing socio-economic and ecological vulnerabilities, which climate change exacerbates. The most critical concerns in the country have to do with food security, water supply and ecosystem services. The vulnerable infrastructure of the Andes mountains and the coastal zones, as well as the increasing demand for resources in urban centres show the on-going failure to include climate change considerations in many regional and local developmental strategies.

## COLOMBIA'S NATIONAL CLIMATE CHANGE FRAMEWORK

Colombia has been a leader in developing a comprehensive governance system around climate change. An institutional framework that prioritised bottom-up climate change planning and action had been under discussion since 2011 and was officially established in 2016 by an executive Decree. The National Climate Change System (*Sistema Nacional de Cambio Climático, SISCLIMA*) operates across governing levels—from local to national—in order to coordinate planning, management and interventions related to climate change adaptation and mitigation across different sectors.

In its Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC), Colombia has committed to reducing its GHG emissions by 20% by 2030 compared to business as usual, and to implementing climate change plans that cover 100% of the national territory in the same time frame.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, it proposes a national system of adaptation indicators that will guide, monitor, and evaluate the implementation of adaptation measures, as well as water management tools for prioritised basins in the country.<sup>7</sup>

Additional executive decrees and laws have been passed in the last decade to strengthen Colombia's comprehensive climate change planning processes, multi-level collaboration for adaptation, renewable energy, and low-emission development.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, the National Climate Change Policy (2017) and the Climate Change Law (2018)<sup>9</sup> incorporate adaptation and mitigation measures that reduce the risks of climate change, aiming for a climate-resilient and low-carbon development in the country's transition to carbon neutrality.<sup>10</sup>

**2020 is a crucial year for the Nodes.** The Colombian Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development (MinAmbiente) is writing regulations and rules to implement the Decree that institutionalised the Nodes in 2016. **These regulations are essential in shaping the future of climate governance in the country.**

<sup>2</sup> Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística (2019).

<sup>3</sup> Ministerio de Cultura (2010).

<sup>4</sup> Government of Colombia (2018b).

<sup>5</sup> Government of Colombia (2015b).

<sup>6</sup> García Arbeláez et al. (2016).

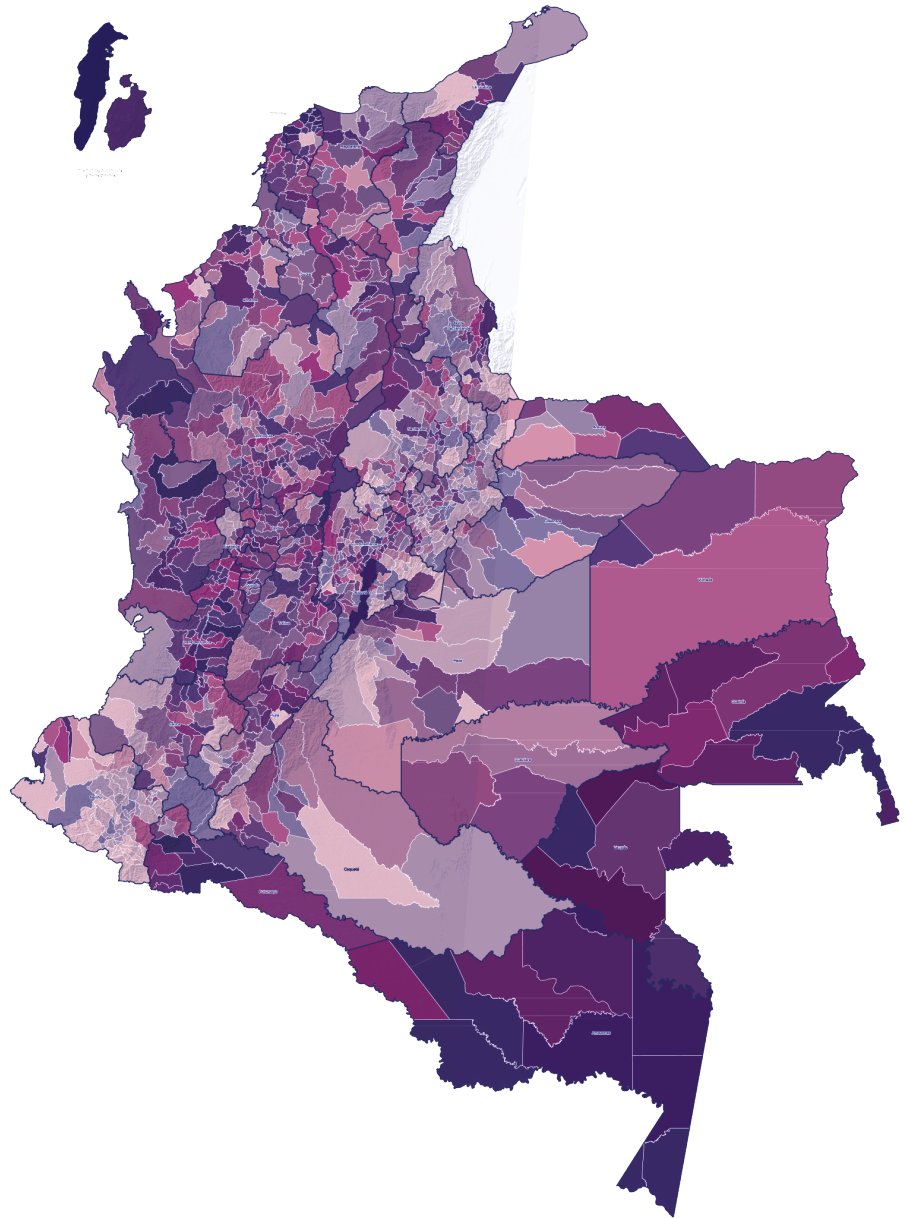
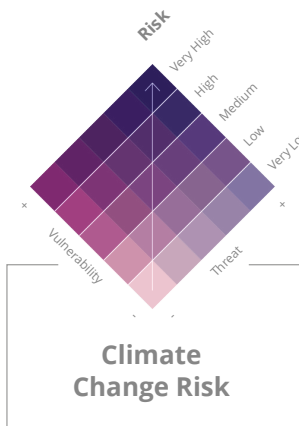
<sup>7</sup> Government of Colombia (2015).

<sup>8</sup> For a complete list of climate change laws and policies in Colombia, see: <https://climate-laws.org/cclow/geographies/colombia>

<sup>9</sup> Government of Colombia (2018).

<sup>10</sup> Government of Colombia (2017c).

Figure 1: Map of climate change risks in Colombia. Source: Government of Colombia (2017).



**National Ranking of Climate Change Risk**

San Andrés, Providencia y Santa Catalina	1	0.74
Vaupés	2	0.54
Amazonas	3	0.45
Guainía	4	0.39
Chocó	5	0.26
Putumayo	6	0.25
Atlántico	7	0.24
Valle del Cauca	8	0.22
Tolima	9	0.21
Caldas	10	0.20
Guaviare	11	0.20
Arauca	12	0.20
Quindío	13	0.20
Córdoba	14	0.19
Bolívar	15	0.19
Norte de Santander	16	0.19
Antioquia	17	0.18
Cundinamarca	18	0.18
Vichada	19	0.18
Magdalena	20	0.18
Huila	21	0.17
La Guajira	22	0.17
Risaralda	23	0.17
Cauca	24	0.17
Boyacá	25	0.16
Caquetá	26	0.16
Meta	27	0.16
Cesar	28	0.16
Santander	29	0.16
Sucre	30	0.15
Casanare	31	0.15
Nariño	32	0.15

## POLICY INTEGRATION ACROSS UNIQUELY DIVERSE REGIONS

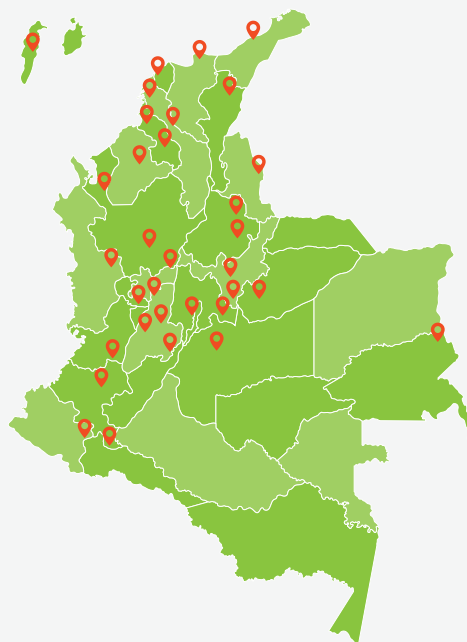
In Colombia, despite advances in incorporating climate change in different planning instruments, **the problem of integrating strategies at the sectoral, national and territorial levels remains. The Nodes are Colombia's flagship endeavour to create a strong territorial counterpart to the national level and deliver strong climate policy coordination between levels of government.** The Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development began the process of forming them in 2010,<sup>11</sup> with the main objective of developing comprehensive climate change plans in line with national policy and strategies that respond to the territorial and socio-demographic context of Colombia's different regions.

In order to achieve this objective, the **Nodes' compositions are unique, encompassing individualised configurations of regional and local governments, civil society, academia, and private sectors.** Often, the Nodes have strong participation of Regional Autonomous Corporations (CARs), regional institutions emerging from the Colombian context (see Box 1).

### BOX 1: WHAT ARE REGIONAL AUTONOMOUS CORPORATIONS?

The Colombian context has unique institutions responsible for regional environmental issues that play a key role in the future of the country's Nodes. The *Corporaciones Autónomas Regionales y de Desarrollo Sostenible* (CARs) are legal public corporate entities, overseeing a geopolitical or hydrographic unit. CARs are financially and administratively autonomous. They are in charge of managing the environment and natural resources within their jurisdiction seeking sustainability.

Crucially, CARs have a longer tradition of discussing and taking action on climate change, often before the Nodes. However, there are over 30 of them throughout the country and the regional vision aimed for larger territories, resulting in the creation of the Nodes. For example, CAR Cundinamarca has developed different materials for educating interested stakeholders. Most CARs are behind the development of Climate Change Management Territorial Plans, many of which are already finished and will guide the territories in terms of adaptation and mitigation actions. The Association of Regional Autonomous Corporations (ASOCARS) groups the 33 CARs in the country, coordinates among them and represents them in discussions with national institutions.



Map of Colombia's Regional Autonomous Corporations (CARs). Source: Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development (2020).

<sup>11</sup> Government of Colombia (2011).



# THE REGIONAL CLIMATE CHANGE NODES

The Regional Climate Nodes are innovative collaborative governance mechanisms designed to achieve one of Colombia's key climate change objectives: Ensure that 100% of its national territory has a context-appropriate plan to adapt to the impacts of climate change and to mitigate GHG emissions. Due to the geographic and demographic diversity of the country, SISCLIMA recognises the importance of territorial planning. The Nodes are the key coordinating body of SISCLIMA at the regional level and were designed to facilitate planning among key stakeholders that have common challenges due to their shared ecosystems and similar economic and social contexts. The transformative potential of the Nodes depends on regional governments coordinating with each other and engaging with civil society, business and labour groups, academia and local communities in order to collaboratively plan climate actions for resilience and sustainable development.

## BOX 2: THE ORIGIN OF COLOMBIA'S REGIONAL CLIMATE CHANGE NODES

The vision of the Nodes originates in the *Eje Cafetero* region, composed by four Colombian Departments. In this region, known as the 'coffee triangle', the Departmental governments and CARs spearheaded a bottom-up pilot program in 2007. Recognising that the region faces socio-ecological and development challenges, the governments designed the 'Agenda for Sustainable Development of the *Eje Cafetero* Ecoregion'. They cooperated to form the *Eje Cafetero* Regional Node in order to facilitate long-term regional cooperation and integrate various governing jurisdictions and interests required to achieve an ecoregion approach.

Seeking a strategy for empowering territorial entities and local population in order to strengthen climate change management in Colombia, the Ministry of Environment decided to use this model for the creation of the Regional Climate Change Nodes in 2010. At present, the Ministry of the Environment and Sustainable Development, through the Climate Change and Risk Management Direction, continues to be the main actor that promotes and drives the work of the Nodes.

**Source: Corporación Autónoma Regional de Risaralda and Universidad Central del Valle (2017).**

## INSTITUTIONAL SETUP AND FLUCTUATING COMPOSITION

The SISCLIMA has two components: the Intersectoral Climate Change Commission (*Comisión Intersectorial de Cambio Climático, CICC*) and the Nodes. The CICC coordinates SISCLIMA. Figure 2 and Box 4 show the location and composition of the nine Nodes. Mandated by Decree, each Node needs to have a minimum representation by different government authorities and other actors, as presented in Box 3.

The Nodes are in continuous coordination with the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development through its Climate Change and Risk Management Directorate. The Directorate appoints an official who communicates directly with the corresponding technical secretariats of the different Nodes and establishes the Nodes' interface and training objectives. The coordination takes place based on the work plan of the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development.

While the Nodes are established by Decree as legal entities, they do not have a recognised status, which means they cannot acquire and own assets, channel financial resources or take legal action (this status is known as *personería jurídica* in Colombia). **This lack of capacity for funding or the direct management of resources represents a critical gap in the design of the Nodes.** Although their activities can be financed through the budgets of the different institutions that constitute each Node, the Node itself cannot request a budget from the national government.

**In essence, no funds can be allocated outside of previously existing territorial jurisdictions (such as Departments or municipalities) and funds from one jurisdiction cannot be spent in a different jurisdiction.** In this way, by bringing together different territorial jurisdictions, a Node's budget depends on the willingness and management system of each separate jurisdiction. **This organisational limitation has major consequences, as the Nodes have no autonomous budget and are unable to implement projects and hire personnel independently.**

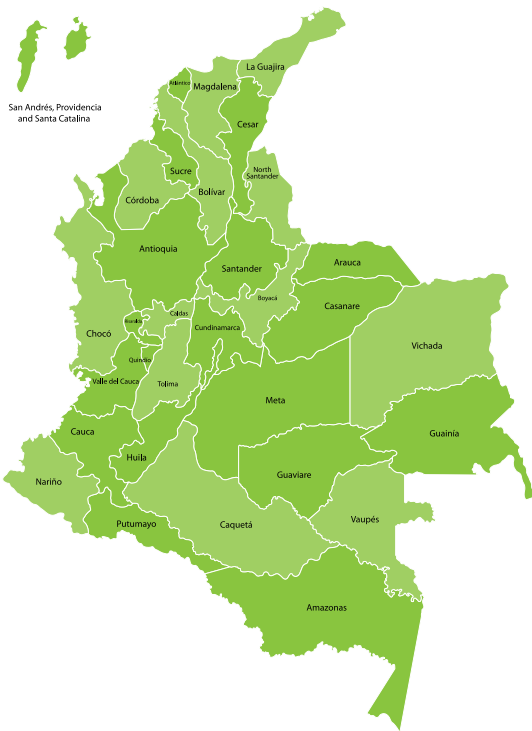
**Most of the representatives that participate in the Nodes have technical backgrounds and are not at the head of the institutions they represent.** In many cases, they are consultants on a limited-time contract and provide expertise and support to an institution represented in a Node. Moreover, several have many other parallel duties and responsibilities that in the best case are complimentary, but often thematically different. For example, in some Nodes, the representatives of some institutions—for instance the CAR or the Mayor's office—is a consultant hired to work on disaster risk management.

### BOX 3: REPRESENTATION OF DIFFERENT ENTITIES AND STAKEHOLDERS IN THE REGIONAL NODES

The Decree that established the National Climate Change System determines the minimum institutional representation that each Node should have. Each should include representatives from:

- Colombian Departments
- Municipalities
- Districts
- Regional Autonomous Corporations
- Trade unions and/or associations of the private sector
- Academia
- Research institutes
- Non-profit entities
- National Natural Parks Unit of Colombia (PNNC)
- A representative of the Territorial Council for Disaster Risk Management

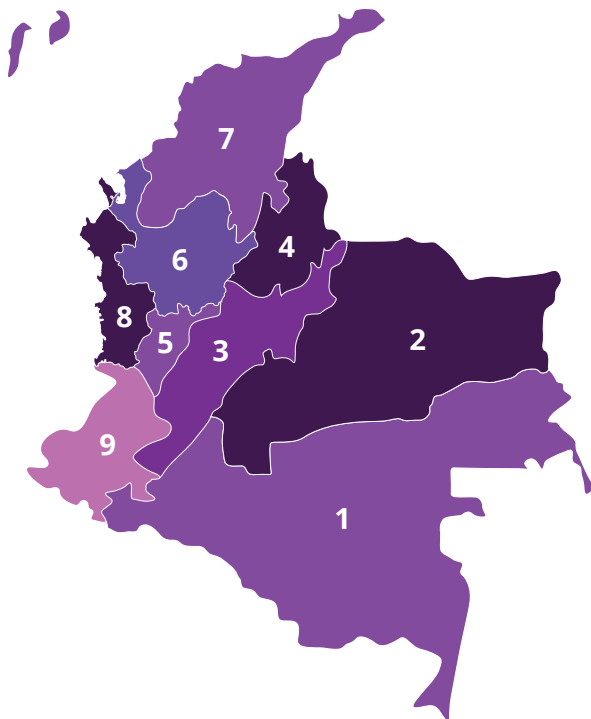
**Source: Government of Colombia (2016b).**



## DIVERSITY AMONG NODES

The nine Colombian Nodes are unique and vary widely in size and composition. The composition of each Node reflects unique environmental, socio-economic, topographic and geopolitical characteristics, as well as unique geopolitical limits (CAR or Departmental).<sup>12</sup>

One Department can participate in more than one Node, and only two of the nine Nodes are made up of a single Department (Antioquia and North Pacific/Chocó). For example, the Amazon Node comprises six Departments that have common ecosystems and river basins and where Departmental authorities and communities face similar challenges related to climate change. This Node brings together the majority of the country's indigenous communities. On the other hand, Antioquia and Chocó were conceived as independent Nodes with the participation of one single Department because their environmental and social circumstances make them distinct from nearby Nodes.



### REGIONAL CLIMATE CHANGE NODES

- 1 Amazon
- 2 Eastern Plains
- 3 Central East Andes
- 4 North Andes
- 5 Eje Cafetero
- 6 Antioquia
- 7 Caribbean and Islands
- 8 North Pacific
- 9 South Pacific

<p><b>1</b></p> <p><b>AMAZON</b></p> <p><u>Departments</u> Amazonas, Caqueta, Guainía, Guaviare, Vaupés, Putumayo</p>	<p><b>2</b></p> <p><b>EASTERN PLAINS</b></p> <p><u>Departments</u> Meta, Casanare, Vichada, Arauca</p>	<p><b>3</b></p> <p><b>CENTRAL EAST ANDES</b></p> <p><u>Departments</u> Boyacá, Cundinamarca, Tolima, Bogotá, Huila</p>
<p><b>4</b></p> <p><b>NORTH ANDES</b></p> <p><u>Departments</u> Norte de Santander, Santander</p>	<p><b>5</b></p> <p><b>EJE CAFETERO</b></p> <p><u>Departments</u> Caldas, Risaralda, Quindío, Valle del Cauca</p>	<p><b>6</b></p> <p><b>ANTIOQUIA</b></p> <p><u>Departments</u> Antioquia</p>
<p><b>7</b></p> <p><b>CARIBBEAN AND ISLANDS</b></p> <p><u>Departments</u> La Guajira, Bolívar, San Andrés y Providencia, Sucre, Córdoba, Magdalena, Atlántico, Cesar</p>	<p><b>8</b></p> <p><b>NORTH PACIFIC</b></p> <p><u>Departments</u> Chocó</p>	<p><b>9</b></p> <p><b>SOUTH PACIFIC</b></p> <p><u>Departments</u> Cauca, Nariño, Valle del Cauca</p>

Figure 2: Maps of Colombia's Departments and Regional Climate Change Nodes. Source: Government of Colombia (2017b).

Figure 3: Structure and Composition of the Regional Climate Change Nodes. Source: Government of Colombia (2016b).

<sup>12</sup> Government of Colombia (2013).

## KEY MANDATE AND FUNCTIONS IN PRACTICE

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The key functions of the Nodes are **coordinating between policy levels** (national, Departmental, municipal), **learning and identifying lessons to replicate** and **supporting coherent local climate planning and participation**. According to the Decree that institutionalised them, the Nodes are responsible for 'promoting, accompanying and supporting the implementation of climate change policies, strategies, plans, programmes, projects and initiatives in the regions, [... achieving] inter-institutional coordination between the central and territorial levels'. They are expected to promote these policies, strategies, plans and actions in a way that is coherent with existing processes in local planning, spatial planning and disaster risk management.<sup>13</sup>

A disconnect between the relevant sectoral ministries/ authorities and the regional and municipal repeatedly came up in interviews for this study. Currently, only the Ministry of Environment works with the Nodes directly, although attempts with other sectors are currently underway according to an official of the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development. The Nodes' connection to the highly relevant sectors that play a key role for climate change adaptation and mitigation takes place indirectly through companies with a private-sector position rather than a sectoral view.

Nodes are also mandated to identify successful **community experiences**, seeking to replicate them in other regions of the country. As a result, key functions include **learning from successful initiatives at different scales** (local, municipal, business) and **replicating those practices** throughout the Node's territories.

The National Climate Change Policy of 2017 establishes that the Nodes must **support the formulation and implementation of comprehensive Departmental plans** for climate change management and reiterates the Nodes' crucial role in inter-institutional coordination at the regional level. They must also support municipalities in **planning local development and integrating it with priority plans**, programmes or projects in relation to climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Likewise, the Nodes can **broaden participation of territorial entities and non-governmental stakeholders in national policy formulation** and debates, in the development of sectoral and territorial climate change adaptation plans and in the implementation of climate change mitigation actions.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Government of Colombia (2016b).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

## BOX 4: STAKEHOLDERS AND ENTITIES PARTICIPATING IN NODES: TWO EXAMPLES

The institutions and actors that participate vary across Nodes. Below are two examples of what the representation in Nodes looks like in practice.

### EJE CAFETERO NODE



#### GOVERNMENT

##### Departmental governments:

- Departmental government of Quindío (Gobernación de Quindío)
- Departmental government of Caldas (Gobernación de Caldas)
- Departmental government of Valle del Cauca (Gobernación del Valle del Cauca)

##### Municipal authorities:

- Municipality of Pereira
- Municipality of Ulloa
- Municipality of Ansermanuevo
- Municipal Association of the Eje Cafetero
- Municipality of Mistrató
- Municipality of Tuluá
- Municipality of Armenia



#### PUBLIC SERVICE COMPANIES

- Water utility of Pereira (Aguas y Aguas de Pereira)
- Sewage utility of Armenia (Empresas Públicas de Armenia)



#### REGIONAL AUTONOMOUS CORPORATIONS

- Regional Autonomous Corporation of Risaralda (CARDER)
- Regional Autonomous Corporation of Caldas (CORPOCALDAS)
- Regional Autonomous Corporation of Quindío (CRQ)
- Regional Autonomous Corporation of Valle del Cauca (CVC)



#### CIVIL SOCIETY

- Global Shapers, a global grassroots network of young people
- Fundación TUKAY, a non-profit organisation that works on environmental education
- ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability, Colombia



#### PRIVATE SECTOR

- Dairy Farmers Association of Pereira (Asociación de productores de leche de Pereira, ASOLACP)
- Colombian Association of Carbon Market Actors (Asociación Colombiana de Actores del Mercado de Carbono, ASOCARBONO)
- Colombian Livestock Farmer Federation (Federación Colombiana de Ganaderos, FEDEGAN)
- National Federation of Sugar Cane Producers (Federación Nacional de Productores de Panela, FEDEPANELA)



#### ACADEMIA

- National University
- National Training Service (Servicio Nacional de Aprendizaje, SENA)

## ANTIOQUIA NODE



### GOVERNMENT

#### Departmental governments:

- Departmental government of Antioquia (Gobernación de Antioquia)

#### Municipal authorities:

- Environment Secretariat of the Metropolitan Area of Valle de Aburrá



### PUBLIC SERVICE COMPANIES

- Public service company of Medellín (Empresa de servicios públicos de Medellín, EPM)



### REGIONAL AUTONOMOUS CORPORATIONS

- Regional Autonomous Corporation of Antioquia (CORANTIOQUIA)
- Regional Autonomous Corporation of the Negro and Nare River Basins (CORNARE)



### CIVIL SOCIETY

- WWF



### PRIVATE SECTOR

- Ecoacciones and Gaia Servicios Ambientales, companies that offer environmental and risk management services
- Antioquia Dairy Cooperative (Cooperativa de Lácteos de Antioquia, Colanta)
- Colombian Chamber of Construction (Cámara Colombiana de Construcción, CAMACOL)



### ACADEMIA

- Antioquia Technical University

## HOW THE NODES WORK IN PRACTICE

The rationale for establishing Nodes in the Colombian territory is sound, but the Nodes do not have the legal status and clarity of mandate that would allow them to meet all their desired outcomes.

Without the recognised legal status of an organisation, Nodes cannot act as direct project implementers, nor directly manage financial resources. Beyond the Nodes' overall mandate established by the Decree, there is no further national guidance that specifies or limits the role that the Nodes should play. Nor does the national government establish the tools and strategies that should enable these functions to be put into practice. This results in a broad and diverse understanding of the Nodes primary tasks and priorities by national government stakeholders (see Box 5).

Furthermore, Nodes operate following a principle of voluntary action and do not have uniquely-assigned personnel. They have a non-obligatory nature and each Node establishes its own operational regulations, as well as a four-year action plan – which is often perceived as non-compulsory and more of an agreement of intent by the entities that participate in the Node. In the vast majority of cases, the designated representatives from the different institutions that make up the Node are not only designated the Node responsibilities, many of them are also responsible for risk management within the organisation's jurisdiction and have other climate change related duties such as overseeing the territorial climate change management plans.

## BOX 5: THE NODES' (UN)OFFICIAL TASKS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Many of the ideas presented in the section on Challenges and Recommendations are based on opinions that come from the regional and local levels. However, stakeholders at the national level believe that the work of the Nodes should be directed towards the following tasks (some are already stated in the Decree 298).



### Collaborative governance

- Act as two-way communication channels and intermediaries between the national and regional levels.
- Support the national government in the monitoring of the Comprehensive Management Plans for Climate Change (CCCMP).
- Compile and report regional and local problems and solutions and raise them with national agencies.



### Vision and inclusiveness

- Identify priorities and build a regional vision for mitigation and adaptation.
- Facilitate communication and promote representation of multiple stakeholders and sectors.



### Implementation of climate actions

- Promote initiatives at the regional and local levels.
- Link risk management and climate change.
- Help channelling resources, creating plans, and providing technical guidelines to the regional and local levels.
- They are channels through which projects, laws, initiatives, etc. are disseminated at the regional and local levels.



### Operations

- Establish their operating mechanisms autonomously.
- Provide own funds for everyday operations.

Source: Interviews

The Nodes follow several steps in the implementation of their action plans. First, Nodes need to identify key stakeholders that are required for developing the plan, based on the roles and interests. Secondly, they must choose one constituent institution that functions as the Node's technical secretariat. For instance, the technical secretariat of the Caribbean and Islands Node is held by the Regional Autonomous Corporation of La Guajira and the secretariat for the North Pacific Node is the Pacific Environmental Research Institute (IIAP). Thirdly, the constituent institutions define their internal decision-making and operating mechanisms and design an action plan. This action plan should allow for a shared vision with concrete initiatives to achieve the goals and objectives set forth by the Node and must meet the objectives of reducing the territory's vulnerability, increasing its resilience and avoiding the accelerated growth of GHG emissions.<sup>15</sup>

In practice, the Nodes are seen by different actors in Departments and municipalities as **an opportunity to highlight the issue of climate change, manage internal resources in a way that strengthens climate change management and secure financing of mitigation and adaptation initiatives in local entities.**<sup>16</sup> However, Colombia's SISCLIMA does not foresee concrete mechanisms and strategies that would allow the Nodes to go beyond coordination functions.

### BOX 6: THE CASE OF THE EJE CAFETERO NODE

Despite still having difficulties in terms of vertical communication and integration with sectors, the *Eje Cafetero* Node is the most advanced one in Colombia. Understanding its history allows for a roadmap towards replication that might be useful in other contexts.

The *Eje Cafetero* Node was launched autonomously by its constituent regional institutions, which had a long tradition of conceiving the area as one region with one vision, overcoming the socio-political divisions in place. The Node has positioned itself as a region, not only because of the cultural and environmental conditions, but also due to the historical ease for exchange and traveling within this territory.

This point is crucial. Because it was a bottom-up initiative that began organically in the region, institutions and actors have a strong commitment with the Node and with the ideals that guided its beginnings. This Node has been successful and creative in finding strategies to overcome financial limitations and problems that arise as a result of changes in administration. They have also been able to have a strong technical team backing the Node. By positioning the work they do on the regional agenda, the Node has succeeded in securing the commitment of the heads of the institutions.

<sup>15</sup> Government of Colombia (2013).

<sup>16</sup> Ecovera (2017).



# VALUE AND OUTCOME

The Nodes are Colombia's flagship endeavour to put forth a strong territorial counterpart to the national level and deliver strong climate policy coordination between levels of government. This undertaking crucially aims for regional and local ownership of national strategies and initiatives. However, the Nodes have not delivered on this vision in its entirety and their performance reflects the difficulty of working at different scales in climate action.

The most important challenges are related to the Nodes' financial and human resources, definition of scope, voice at the national level and subnational political will. Many of these challenges are already recognised in the country, and the national government is currently considering regulatory reforms to increase the Nodes' effectiveness. Concretely, the government is debating the lack of resources and the due consideration of regional and local complexities within the Nodes' institutional design. The government is also designing a strategy to allow the participation of the Nodes in the CICC and to connect them with climate-relevant actors as key allies in NDC implementation. We offer our insights for this process in the next section.





# CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A decade into their existence, the Nodes have not yet achieved the potential of integrating different levels of governance in climate policy. While SISCLIMA has managed to facilitate inter-ministerial coordination at the national level through the Inter-sectoral Commission on Climate Change, the Nodes have not yet delivered on their vision of subnational integration. Today, the great challenge remains in the ability to articulate the different strategies and guidelines that have emerged from the national level with the climate change management plans developed at regional levels.<sup>17</sup> In order for the Nodes to step up and close this gap, some challenges need to be addressed.

## IMPROVE THE NODES' FINANCIAL RESOURCES

One of the main barriers for the effectiveness of the Nodes is the lack of autonomous management of financial resources required to maintain their daily operations. In essence, the Nodes' financial resources currently depend on what the conforming entities themselves decide to allocate to the Node's operations. This is especially challenging for those regions with an overall deficiency of resources—particularly at a time in which regional and local budgets are being redirected to COVID-19 priorities.

In general, Nodes that have more resources make much more progress than those that do not. A clear example is the CAR of the Negro and Nare River Basins in the jurisdiction of the *Eje Cafetero* Node, which has a higher level of resources compared to, for instance, the CAR of the Department of Chocó (North Pacific Node). The latter has limited resources and faces several socio-economic burdens.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- If the national level demands certain functions from the Nodes, it must provide an enabling framework that allows for the necessary resources and support. The national level should allocate additional funds (in addition to the funds the participating subnational institutions provide) to enable the Nodes to fulfil their functions. Otherwise, this burden falls on regional and local institutions, whose budgets are strained—especially in the context of the COVID-19 response and recovery.
- Financial resources should be channelled directly to the Nodes, not through third-party consultancies. Financial support and strategies that guarantee continuity and mobilise buy-in of the heads of the constituent organisations should be provided by the national level.
- The work of the Nodes should not depend on what each constituent institution determines. The work plan should be developed jointly by the Node members and guide the work of the institutions that are a part of the Node. Implementing tools to track resources destined for the Nodes and involving them in the evaluation of the work done could help.
- The cost of travel from remote areas and the budget limitations of relevant jurisdictions often preclude the participation of ethnic groups in Nodes' meetings and activities. The national level should consider whether it can provide special funds to alleviate this situation.

<sup>17</sup> Government of Colombia (2019).

## STRENGTHEN THE NODES' HUMAN RESOURCES

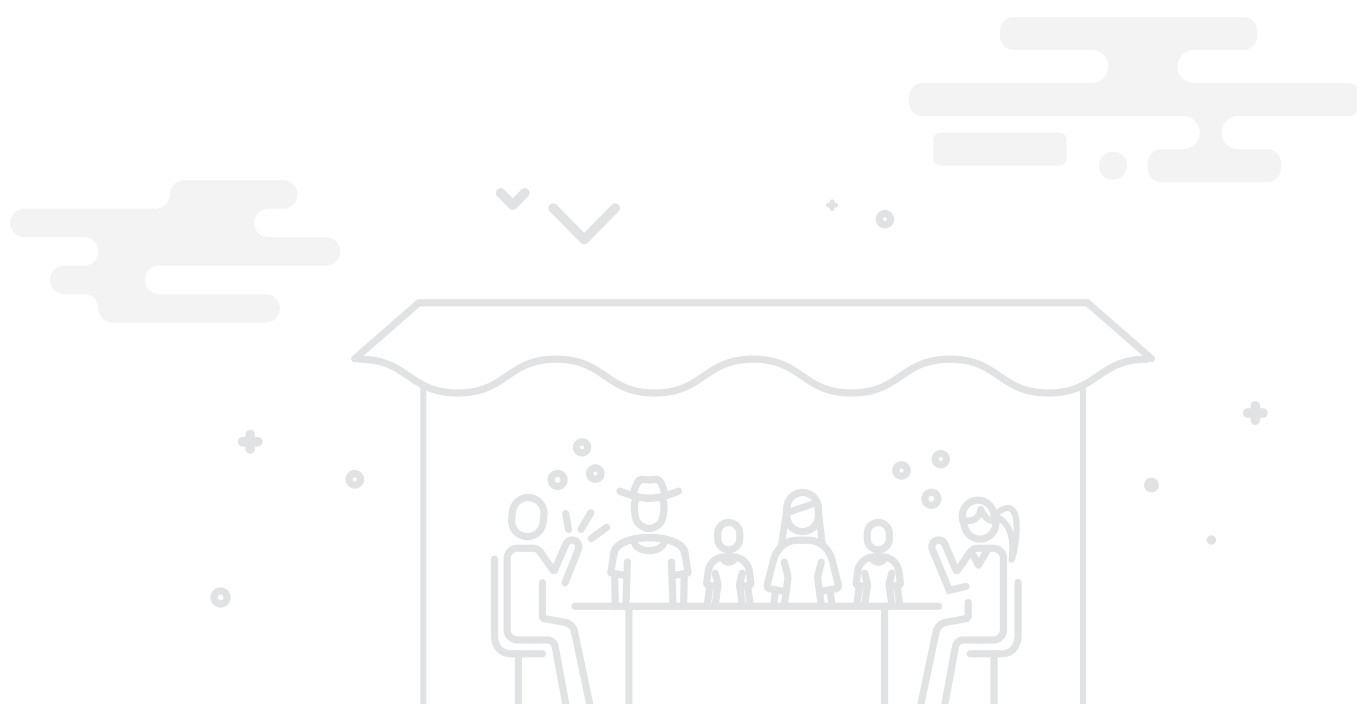
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There is **great heterogeneity in the capacities of the different Nodes**.<sup>18</sup> While the *Eje Cafetero* Regional Node has a greater **capacity for inter-institutional coordination**, other Nodes, such as the North Pacific and Amazon Nodes, exhibit difficulties in their operations. For example, when inquiring about recent meetings of the North Pacific Node, representatives expressed that as a result of the diversity of stakeholders and limited resources, they were not able to meet regularly—in some cases with more than a year passing between meetings.

In some instances the **technical capacity** related to climate change is missing. For example, in Antioquia, the Node noted that no staff member is dedicated exclusively to the topic of climate change. Civil servants that are assigned to participate in the Node have multiple tasks to perform. Moreover, the assigned staff often changes every four years with the political administration, which affects the long-term planning crucial to effective climate change adaptation and mitigation policy and action. In other cases, those that perform the tasks of the Nodes are temporary consultants. In this way, there is a substantial loss of institutional knowledge that affects the Nodes when they leave the administration.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Relevant decision makers that represent institutions (not external consultants) should be appointed to participate in the Nodes.
- In turn, these institutional representatives should be familiar with the climate change challenges in the region, capacitated in inter-institutional coordination and ideally not overwhelmed with largely unrelated responsibilities.



<sup>18</sup> Government of Colombia (2019); Ecovera (2017).

## ESTABLISH AN ENABLING FRAMEWORK FOR POWER AND IMPACT

A Node representative explained ‘adaptation to climate change happens at the local level’, and yet the **information on priorities and on what is implemented at the local level ‘does not tend to be reflected in policy instruments at the central, [national] level’.**<sup>19</sup> For example, the interviewees stated that available vulnerability analyses in different regions were not sufficiently reflected on the Third National Climate Change Communication to the UNFCCC, for example in the South Pacific Node. On the other side of the coin, technical climate information and data developed at the national level often does not always reach the regions and municipalities nor reflect the diversity of regions.

Often, high-level decision makers (such as department directors) are not represented in the Nodes. Selected representatives are usually government staff or contractors that have several other tasks in their portfolio and do not have significant decision-making powers. As a result, the Nodes often express a **lack of power for making decisions.** In addition, while Node coordination meetings take place and are important, **Nodes have limited power to undertake additional, concrete activities.** This limited power has to do with the lack of financial resources and rather limited decision-making powers of those that participate in Node meetings (see recommendations above). It also has to do with the Nodes not having budgeting capacity, due to the missing legal status to manage and spend resources. The lack of progress and real impact on national instruments and policies affects the motivation of Node participants.

Colombia’s unilateral and unconditional NDC goal is to reduce its overall GHG by 20% by 2030.<sup>20</sup> To achieve this goal, the following sectors are included: Agriculture, Forestry and Other Land Use (AFOLU), industry, energy supply, residential and commercial, waste management and transport. But there is a **disconnect between the sectoral ministries and authorities on the one hand and the regional and municipal levels on the other.** Currently, while the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development works directly with the Nodes, the Nodes’ connection to other highly relevant sectors that play a key role for climate change adaptation and mitigation takes place often indirectly through companies with a private-sector position rather than a public sectoral view. For example, in the Eastern Plains, which has vast oil resources, private/public companies are represented in the Node, instead of a high-level government representative.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- In order to achieve the objectives set out in their action plans and better contribute to the attainment of Colombia’s NDC, **the Nodes need representation at the national level, more decision-making power, support from the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development, and more direct connection with the relevant sectors.**
- **Representation:** The Nodes need a space to participate in national-level decision-making processes, at the minimum through a seat in the **Inter-sectoral Commission on Climate Change.** This would enable fair representation of the regional and local levels and unlock regional and local information sharing with the national level.
- Technical climate data developed at the national level should be accompanied by processes of knowledge appropriation together with the regions and municipalities that ensures that the national-level data is indeed understood and used at the subnational level.
- **Effectiveness and power:** The Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development should strengthen the team that supports the Nodes in order to develop better tools and guidelines to generate information and processes in the regions, facilitating better integration between different sectors and the Nodes. This will ultimately contribute to the implementation of regional actions required to achieve the NDC.
- The Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development should provide the required tools for and guidance on concrete steps for Nodes to achieve their action plans. In turn, action plans need to be concrete, transcend administrations, and guide the actions of the institutions involved.
- In order to engage key decision makers, Nodes could establish mandatory periodical meetings with heads of departments and other institutions (depending on the necessities of each Node, the meetings could be annual).
- **Link to relevant sectors:** Given that Colombia’s main GHG sources come from the AFOLU sector,<sup>21</sup> there is an urgent need for the Nodes and the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development to coordinate relevant actions so that local government can effectively contribute to emission reductions in the sector.
- Regarding adaptation, the link between sectoral and subnational adaptation plans is weak and there is an urgent need to integrate them.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with the Central East Andes Node (2020).

<sup>20</sup> Government of Colombia (2015).

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

## ADAPT SELECTED NODES' SCOPE AND GOVERNANCE

The scope of some Nodes is vast. The diversity encompassed within single Nodes can limit their effectiveness. Crucially, the needs, priorities and visions of different parts of some Nodes are sometimes irreconcilable and lead to different institutions simply working independently in practice—which undermines the entire Nodes' *raison d'être*. The geographic composition of some Nodes hinders the ability to successfully organise coordination meetings with all relevant actors. For example, a representative of the South Pacific Node stated that the Andean zone included in this Node has little to do with the rest of the Node's territory in terms of culture, socio-economic conditions and geography, which determines the climatic issues they face and their priorities. Other Nodes cover extremely wide territories. For instance, the Amazon Node covers a large part of the Colombian territory and six Departmental jurisdictions. A further example is the Caribbean and Islands Node that includes San Andrés y Providencia, two island groups in the Caribbean Sea more than 700 km away from the mainland.

**There is a widespread perception in several regions that what constitutes a region was imposed from the national level and not entirely based on the region's vision and self-understanding.** The only Node that determined from the beginning how the region should be defined was the *Eje Cafetero* Node.

**More traditional jurisdictions and existing governance mechanisms can offer the key to finding a scope for each Node that best responds to the unique conditions and visions of each region.** Many Colombian Departments have developed climate change working groups (*Mesas Departamentales de Cambio Climático*) that are currently working well, advancing on a climate change agenda for the territories and developing concrete actions towards the Departments' climate change plans. Departments themselves have more resources available in their delimited jurisdictions and leverage to generate real impact in Colombia's regions. As stated in the interviews, these working groups do not have a clear relation with the Nodes and the role they should play within them. Administrative and Planning Regions (RAP) are also interesting actors. They are supra-regional public entities that aim to promote and integrate the social, economic and environmental development plans and bring together different Departments. RAPs have '*personería jurídica*', a legal status that gives them the ability to manage their own financial resources,<sup>22</sup> and are created upon agreement among local governments with the approval of the respective Autonomous Corporations.

**Governance arrangements can be improved in some Nodes.** For instance, given that most Nodes bring together more than one Department, the work related to the Node is more dynamic in the Department where the technical secretariat is located. In both the Eastern Plains and the North Andes Nodes, for example, there are difficulties caused by the placement of the technical secretariat in one Department for several years, partly leading to the other constituent Departments to feel 'left behind'.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The Nodes need not be a standardised solution to all Colombian regions. Readjust the scope of selected Nodes in order to cater to the unique conditions and own regional visions, and build on governance mechanisms that are already in place and work well. Two prominent examples are existing Departmental climate change working groups (*Mesas Departamentales de Cambio Climático*) and Administrative Planning Regions (RAP).
- Nodes are a flagship mechanism for policy coordination and integration in Colombia. While not doing away with them, **the geographic composition of each Node can be revisited and adjusted, always in close consultation between regional, local and national government actors.** Concretely, in some regions, areas could be redefined or readjusted in accordance to the Departmental level. Departmental governments have shown that they can be adequate actors to take over (rotating) Nodes' technical secretariats.
- Consider the possibility of involving in each Node institutions with a regional purview, such as RAPs. These have a regional approach and their resources, leverage, impact and influence that can boost the Nodes. In the Central East Andes Node, for example, the technical secretariat was recently moved to the Central Region RAP with promising results.
- Establish clear rules for the technical secretariat to rotate or for each Department to have its own secretariat.

<sup>22</sup> Government of Colombia (2011).

## SHOW SUBNATIONAL POLITICAL WILL AND EMBED IT IN LONG-TERM REGIONAL VISION

Other needs are often prioritised over climate change at the regional and local levels. For example, in the North Pacific Node, the issue of climate change lacks the necessary prioritisation in the face of other pressing needs in a region with significant poverty levels and some of the highest violence and conflict rates in the country. Currently, the COVID-19 response and recovery present yet another urgent priority that can be seen as competing with climate change. In addition, climate action is not as popular at the local level because the results of projects are often long-term and not immediately visible. The tangible impacts of adaptation projects usually take longer than the four-year term of a political administration.

Many necessary planning instruments are already in use in the regions. **But for many entities, managers, and officials, it is difficult to understand how these subnational instruments (for example government development plans, land-use plans, climate change plans, among others) are integrated with each other in the territory and justify resource investment for climate change initiatives.**

The vision of different parts of some Nodes are sometimes irreconcilable. **As a result, different institutions have parallel agendas and pursue their own interests, without following the guidelines or action plans generated by the Node as a whole.** For example, in the vast Caribbean and Islands Node, the different Departments are conducting interesting work separately, and only consolidate their actions for reporting at the Node level, without the Node bringing the regions an actual added value.

International cooperation impacts the Nodes. In the Antioquia Node, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) was involved in supporting the development of the Department's CCCMP. While this project was ongoing, the Node made good progress and had important results. However, once it was completed, the management of the Node collapsed, and has not yet recovered.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- In order to be prioritised in action plans, **climate change first needs to be prioritised by the subnational political level. Clear signals of the prioritisation of climate policy need to come from key politicians at the regional and local levels (governors, ministers, mayors).** As a key step, climate initiatives should be recognised and embedded in long-term strategies and instruments.
- Political actors need to give clear signals of support for the climate agenda. **Initiatives should be integrated into the appropriate long-term strategies and instruments at the subnational levels. While climate change has been widely recognised as a political priority (especially in the aftermath of the La Niña events in Colombia in 2010-2011), this needs to be taken to a subnational level in a coherent, integrated manner with the different relevant sectors.**
- Likewise, climate change should be embedded in the development of regional visions. There are still several municipalities that do not tackle climate change in their development plans or in land use plans—key instruments for climate change adaptation and mitigation planning at the local level. The same happens with the climate change plans that are being developed on a Departmental scale and do not provide specific recommendations to include in other subnational policy instruments.
- Multilateral and bilateral development cooperation agencies should embed their work into local and regional long-term strategies and carefully consider their exit strategies in the project design stage. Despite the critical support that the international cooperation brings to the climate change work regionally and locally, it is important that the governmental actors have the capacities and resources to sustain the work after the cooperation leaves, so that the achievements are not undermined upon project completion.





# KEY RESOURCES

Although the Nodes have been crucial in climate policy in the country for 10 years, the lack of literature on them is remarkable. This publication aims to close this gap. The links to these resources are also included in our Bibliography.

1

The main regulations mandating the Nodes are available for download:

- Decree 298 of 2016
- National Climate Change Policy

2

WWF and the Ministry of Environment published a study in 2013 that describes some of the tools Nodes use in their work.

3

To better understand the reality of each Node, it is fundamental to be familiar with the document commissioned by the Ministry of Environment that presents a diagnosis of the Regional Nodes (Ecoversa, 2017). Access requires a formal request to the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development.  
Website: <https://www.minambiente.gov.co/index.php/cambio-climatico>

4

The Third National Communication on Climate Change to the UNFCCC is useful for understanding how emissions and vulnerability are mapped in Colombia.



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STIMULATING  
URBAN CLIMATE ACTION