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Between climate justice and the implementation of NDCs

Contributions of civil society to climate policies in seven countries

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Abstract

In their function as advocates for nature and representatives of the people, civil society groups are in many countries important catalysts for more ambitious and transparent climate policies, as well as their successful implementation at the national and local level.

Looking into examples from seven countries (Brazil, Georgia, Indonesia, Colombia, the Philippines, Uganda and Ukraine), this English summary of the UfU-Paper 1/2019 analyses how environmental Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other civil society groups contribute to the development and implementation of climate policies at the (sub-)national level. Context analyses and interviews with experts and representatives from civil society from seven countries have been the basis for this research.

The portfolio of climate-policy related activities of the examined environmental NGOs comprises „Outside“ and „Inside“-activities, as well as measures of harm reduction and self-help. A summary about the activities of climate-driven civil society groups in each of the examined countries, as well as an analysis of the civic space open for climate-related activities in each country can be found in the country factsheets at the end of this publication.

Summing up the analysis of the activities of climate-driven civil society groups in Brazil, Georgia, Indonesia, Colombia, the Philippines, Uganda and Ukraine, it can be seen that in all examined countries, the climate-driven civil society is active in the provision of information and climate education. Grassroots work with citizens on climate policy including advocacy work seems to be part of the activities of many of the examined environmental NGOs, as well as the development and publication of own positions on climate policies. This is also true for the linking of climate policy with social topics. However, campaigns on climate policy do not seem to be as far-reaching as in European countries, whereas court cases on climate are still rare, but growing.

Regarding climate policies, the depth, manner and regularity of cooperation with government institutions, as well as the importance of confrontational activities seem to vary widely between countries and between NGOs. Further research may look into how far and how exactly political, cultural and societal frameworks as well as participation opportunities in climate policy affect the climate-driven civil society's choice of suitable activities.

Civil Society and the 1.5°C target

Four years after the adoption of the Paris agreement in 2015, the international community is far from reaching its target to prevent a global temperature stabilisation level at or slightly above 1.5°C relative to pre-industrial levels. Consequently, the UNEP's *Emissions Gap Report* concludes that the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs¹) of all contributing states cover only one third of the emission reductions needed. This results in an "alarmingly high"² gap. Thus, the readjustment and improvement of national strategies as well as ensuring of the fast and comprehensive implementation of the NDCs is of high priority.

Civil society groups with the ambitions, capacities and personal plus financial resources to address climate issues continuously are important catalysts for an ambitious and transparent NDC development and their implementation on a national and local scale. They also can take care of the integration of local peculiarities to ensure the fairness of necessary adjustments.³ As advocates for nature, NGOs supervise their compliance with national climate goals, make defaults in the (sub-)national implementation visible, expose inhibiting legislative initiatives and support government agencies with the implementation of climate protection measures, among others.⁴ NGOs also act as representatives of the population and can thus raise awareness for existing climate protection practices of traditional population groups, promote climate change adaptation measures among the vulnerable population or improve citizen participation in climate policy processes.⁵ Therefore, NGOs contribute to the embedment of climate protection measures in society and to the improvement of national climate protection strategies, if the political and social context permits it.

But what exactly are their climate-relevant activities on a national level? What climate policy-related capacities do environmental organizations use in different countries to work towards more ambitious climate goals? Are there any hints that environmental organizations undergo specific changes on their way to an independent and - as far as possible - comprehensive participation in national climate politics?

This English summary of the UfU-Paper "*Zwischen Klimagerechtigkeit und der Implementierung der NDCs: Beiträge der Zivilgesellschaft in sieben Ländern*" emphasizes first results of an analysis of the work and development of climate-driven civil society groups in Brazil, Georgia, Indonesia, Colombia, the Philippines, Uganda and the Ukraine. This summary focuses on similarities and differences in current activities and capacities of climate-driven civil society groups between all investigated countries.

¹ The Nationally Determined Contributions refer to the intended reductions in greenhouse gas emissions that every country which has ratified the Paris agreement is bound to submit and implement.

² UNEP (2017)

³ Bond, Meghan (2010); Beisheim, Marianne (2005)

⁴ Reid, Hannah et al. (2012), S. 109

⁵ *ibid.*

Every comprehensive analysis of climate-related activities and capacities of civil society needs to link these aspects with the wider socio-political context and the given civic space in each individual country. The related country fact sheets in this publication give further details on the background in each respective country, about given participation possibilities in climate policies (civic space), as well as climate-related activities and capacities of its civil society. A more detailed analysis of civic spaces is object of further research in the project *Strengthen Civil Society for the implementation of national climate policy (ZIVIKLI)*,⁶

Climate related activities of civil societies in seven countries – an overview

Without a comprehensive as well as detailed analysis of civil society efforts to influence climate policies and climate protection, conclusions can hardly be drawn on the strategies of climate-driven civil society groups. The amount of former studies on that issue is by far too low and until now even the activities of civil societies themselves have scarcely been investigated. Usually activists decide on their climate policy actions and strategies also with regard to the given civic space. However, due to the complexity of the issue an evaluation of the exact correlations and dependencies of these two aspects is no subject of this paper.

Rather the climate-driven civil societies of the examined countries will be compared based on the scopes of their activities in the different fields. Ensuing this, similarities and differences between focuses of different civil society groups will be determined. Here it is important to note that the causes for an engagement of civil society groups in certain climate policy activities are often very diverse and complex. Thus, the determination of concrete cause-effect relationships for the prioritization of certain activities is not possible and this analysis is limited to the similarities of climate policy activities in the given countries.

Activities of climate-driven civil society groups

In all countries examined in this study, the **provision of information on climate change and climate policies** seems to make up the major part of the climate policy work of environmental organizations. Activities to uncover state actions and their social and ecological effects are part of this. Environmental organizations in Brazil for example train local experts to watch and report the climate relevant political developments in their communities or federal states. A network of

⁶ The project ZIVIKLI is funded by the International Climate Protection Initiative (IKI) and aims at strengthening the climate policy profiles and activities of environmental organizations already active in that field in Georgia, Colombia and the Ukraine. Further, questions about civil society participation in climate politics will be scientifically investigated in these countries.

local offices and experts is also used in Indonesia in order to ensure a comprehensive multi-level monitoring of climate relevant policies. In all examined countries the provision of information also encompasses **climate education** of youths and adults. All studied environmental groups invest many resources into the production of coherent information on climate change and climate policies and thus make the mostly complex issues accessible for laymen.

An important part of the activities of climate-driven civil society groups is the **work as watchdog**, i.e. the constant supervision and publication of the governments' progresses in complying with its climate policy ambitions. Climate-driven civil society groups vary in their focus on that: While supervision plays a major role in the work of the Brazilian climate policy networks and the Indonesian climate-driven civil society, environmental organizations in Georgia hardly ever engage in this; seemingly due to their close collaboration with government agencies.

Another large share of activities of climate-driven civil society groups can be defined as **grassroots work**: Many climate protection and adaptation measures of the surveyed organizations take place on a local and regional level and include direct communication with and integration of citizens or certain groups, e.g. indigenous people, traditional communities, women, children, peasants or other vulnerable members of the population. In this context, the organizations mainly deal with climate relevant subtopics. Additionally, grassroots work seems to encompass the **linkage of social and climate issues** in almost all investigated countries. That linkage however is dealt with in varying intensities: In Brazil and Indonesia the linkage of social and climate issues is a well-established part of grassroots work in climate-driven civil society groups, whereas it is of little importance in the Ukraine. The integration of social issues into grassroots work is advantageous as the information of citizens on the influence of climate change and climate policies on their everyday life raises awareness in the population about the otherwise rather abstract climate related issues. Also, integration is necessary for the development and enforcement of socially compatible climate protection and climate change adaptation measures.

Closely related to the aforementioned is **advocacy work**, which seems to be of increasing importance to environmental organizations. Many of these use their connections to citizens to collect climate policy relevant problems and requests of those affected by climate change or climate policy measures, and present these decision makers. This kind of advocacy work is mainly centered on climate-relevant subtopics. In Colombia, Brazil and Indonesia, in which climate-driven civil society groups put a strong emphasis on grassroots work, these subtopics are e.g. forest protection and land rights. In Uganda climate change adaptation is of major concern. However, climate-driven civil society groups in the Philippines are an exception as many of them are directly involved in the development of local and regional climate plans and are therewith engaged in the participatory definition of problems and challenges to integrate the needs of the citizens affected by climate change into climate action plans.

Ideally, by engaging in these activities, climate-driven civil society groups can put their own climate policy issues on the political agenda and contribute to the tailoring of climate protection and adaptation measures to the needs of the citizens of the respective country or region. Thus, **agenda setting** and **advocacy work** promote the social acceptability of climate policy measures. A special kind of agenda setting is the development and propagation of common positions and proclamations of the climate-driven civil society on national climate policies and their targets. Position papers of this kind which were signed by a large amount of NGOs so far exist in Brazil and the Ukraine only (Status: January 2019).

In order to influence climate policies in their countries and to plan and support climate policy measures, civil society groups in all investigated countries **co-operate with decision makers and government agencies**. This is independent of whether or not the government provides official cooperation formats on a regular base. The level of trust between government representatives and actors of environmental organizations the issues dealt with, the general framework and the cooperation format seem to have an impact on the kind and depth of cooperation. The kind and depth of cooperation differ immensely between the evaluated countries. In the Philippines for example, government agencies collaborate closely with the climate-driven civil society mainly to draw on their expertise for local and regional climate protection and adaptation measures and to receive professional support for the preparation of and participation in international climate negotiations. The climate-driven civil society of the Ukraine cooperates not only with government agencies but also with international organizations. In contrast to that, environmental organizations in Indonesia and Brazil rather conform with *a critical engagement* and only cooperate with government agencies if they consider their approaches expedient in the respective field. If that is not the case, environmental organizations tend to focus on the critical analyses of their government's climate policy and on promoting public pressure for policy shifts. Regarding these rather **confrontational climate policy activities** it is rather striking that national climate protests have not been organized in any of the countries investigated. Any protests that actually took place rather focused on climate relevant subtopics like renewable energies or forest protection.

Another aspect in which the activities of climate-driven civil society groups vary strongly between the investigated countries are self-help activities, i.e. the planning and implementation of measures for climate protection and climate change adaptation in those regions or for those parts of the population in or for which government agents cannot or will not get active in or with. Environmental organizations mainly seem to engage in these **harm limiting activities** if the implementation of climate policy measures cannot be forwarded by political instruments only, e.g. due to a lack of experts and expertise in government agencies or lacking government presence in certain region. This is mostly the case in countries with inaccessible areas or population groups and low financial or human resources. For example, Indonesia's environmental network *WAHLI* supports the government directly with the planning and implementation of the *Social Forestry*

Program for climate protection in inaccessible regions. Also, in the Philippines, which are similarly inaccessible due to their many islands, climate-driven civil society contributes expertise to the planning of climate policies on a regional scale and thus renders the implementation of climate protection and adaptation measures in some regions.

While civil society activities for the facilitation of **negotiations with third parties** hardly play any role at all in the investigated countries, **climate change-related lawsuits** seem to gain momentum although currently they are only part of climate policy activities of environmental organizations in Colombia and the Philippines. In both countries, lawsuit initiatives by climate-driven civil society groups took place in collaboration with international partners.

Developing capacities and resources to participate in climate policy-making

In many countries, groups have formed out of environmental civil society which critically supervise or influence climate policies. However, participation of these groups in climate issues varies in intensity and regularity. Consequently, the capacities and resources that civil society groups in the examined countries can allocate to participate in climate policy planning and implementation differ widely. This becomes, for example, obvious in the differing financial and human resources available to environmental NGOs for their work on climate policy issues. Although currently, climate driven civil society groups in the analyzed countries seem to be situated in different phases of their development, the analyzed case studies shed light on some similarities among civil society groups in developing capacities and using resources to contribute to climate policy planning and implementation. In some countries, civil society groups see climate policies as overarching issues (e.g. in Georgia and Indonesia) or only as a side-topic related to their main activities (e.g. Uganda). This often goes along with limited resources for climate policy work. In spite of the often low levels of climate policy participation, all NGOs engage in self-help activities, e.g. to prepare the population for the effects of climate change (e.g. Uganda and Philippines). Environmental civil society in many countries seem to approach climate related work through information sharing and climate education activities. NGOs in all assessed countries carried out activities in this field. The critical analysis of climate policies of their governments seems to be the next step towards a regular climate-related work of civil society groups.

Conclusion

As advocates for nature and representatives of the population, climate-driven civil society groups contribute to the development and implementation of climate policies adapted to social and ecological reality on a national and sub-national level. A great variety of climate policy activities further make climate-driven civil society groups catalysts for a comprehensive, effective and professional implementation of climate protection and adaptation measures.

Climate policy activities comprise, among others, the processing and publication of information on climate change and climate policies as well as the publication of information on and supervision of pro- or regress of the government's climate policy. They further engage in linking social and climate policy issues as well as grassroots work, such as compiling citizen's claims and advocating the consideration of these claims in climate policies. Other activities include climate policy cooperation with (sub-)national government agencies as well as confrontational activities, such as protests, public campaigns on climate protection and adaptation or harm reduction in these issues. Activities in the legal field, such as law suits, are a comparatively new form of climate policy action.

Although the limited scope of this study and the object under examination do not permit general conclusions, the analysis and comparison of activities of the climate-driven civil society in different countries indicate tendencies in the focus of their work:

The climate-driven civil society groups of all countries are actively engaged in providing climate related information and education. Grassroots work including advocacy work seems to be as much part of the activities of many environmental organizations as the development and publication of their climate policy positions (agenda setting). This is also the case for the linkage of social and climate policy issues. However, the depth, frequency and kind of climate policy cooperation with government agencies as well as the relevance of confrontational activities vary. Climate policy campaigns in all countries examined are not as far reaching as in European countries and law suits by civil society are still rare though growing in importance.

In the process of developing capacities and resources to participate in climate policy-making, many environmental organizations seem to evolve along certain stages as the need for financial and human resources increase as much as the expertise within the respective organization. In the initial phase, many environmental organizations define climate change as a secondary or overarching issue and consequently deal with it passively only. A first step towards more climate policy engagement in many countries seems to be the processing and publication of climate change related information. This is often followed by the development and publication of the organization's own positions on different climate policy issues. Only if the growing expertise as well as growing financial

and human resources permit a certain independence regarding climate policy issues, climate policy networks begin to establish and collaborations with government institutions – if considered acceptable - commence. However, government collaboration may also take place during earlier phases already (e.g. in the Philippines).

It remains to be determined by further research, whether the tendencies observed in this study can be found in other countries as well.

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The Independent Institute for Environmental Issues (UfU e.V.) is both a scientific and officially recognized non-governmental organization. It initiates and manages civil-society-relevant and public, scientific projects, activities and networks, pushing for the change of ecologically unsustainable conditions while supporting and requiring the participation of citizens.

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