

Civil Society Engagement for Ambitious NDCs

**Opportunities and challenges of civil society
involvement in the update and implementation
of Nationally Determined Contributions**

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HIGHLIGHTS

The emission reduction targets that parties to the Paris Agreement pledge in their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) are too weak to limit global warming to 1.5°C¹. In addition, stakeholders who are affected most by the impacts of climate change are often neglected in the process of updating the NDC. Not only do NDCs need to show more ambition to reach the Paris goals, they also must be the result of a participatory and inclusive dialogue with citizens and civil society organisations (CSOs) representing them.

Although the NDC is a cross-cutting document with significant impacts on people's livelihoods and their country's development, CSOs are underrepresented in the NDC development process. Local knowledge, needs and aspirations that are domestically and internationally represented by NGOs and CSOs must be recognized.

The following recommendations should be followed to establish a cyclical NDC update process that is both inclusive and efficient.

RESOURCES: Align processes and share responsibilities with stakeholders. Consider international support to finance inclusive dialogues for a reasonable NDC-update.

MAPPING: Identify relevant civil society actors who might be affected by or contribute to climate policy from local to national level by accessing civil society's networks. Capture the plurality of society.

ACCESSIBILITY: Ensure the accessibility for identified stakeholders through, inter alia, clear, timely and transparent communication. Build stakeholders' capacities where needed.

RESPONSIBILITIES: Share responsibilities with involved actors and clarify roles in advance. Clarify how participation will be organized and how decisions will be made.

PLAN ENGAGEMENT PRACTICES: Develop a thoroughly organized engagement plan that takes into account a wise combination of different forms of consultation, participation and cooperation. Plan face-to-face meetings as well as online surveys.

TIMELINE: Design a transparent timeline of stakeholder engagement. Consider the global stocktake and the cyclic NDC updates every 5 years. Start 2 years or earlier before the submission deadline.

INSTITUTIONALIZATION: Employ an independent facilitation office to coordinate and sustain participatory processes in climate policy.

INTRODUCTION

To this date, 187 countries have ratified the Paris Agreement. By doing so, they have committed themselves to revise their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) in a 5-year cycle starting in 2020. The first round of NDCs, drafted before the signing of the Paris Agreement in 2015, was much too weak. Taken together, the sum of all NDCs, if implemented, would lead to global warming of more than 3 degrees Celsius, instead of the 1.5 degrees above industrial levels stipulated by the Paris Agreement.

Therefore, more ambitious NDCs should take into account local needs and expertise². All the more so, because strong climate policies that are grounded in local communities induce socio-economic co-benefits³.

In the following paper, BUND (Friends of the Earth Germany) shares experiences gained in the context of the ongoing project: "Strengthening civil society in the implementation of national climate policy", which is supported by the International Climate Initiative (IKI) of Germany's Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety (BMU). As we observed throughout the project in Colombia, Georgia and Ukraine, the NDC affects a wide range of stakeholders from the local to the national level. This also implies that a large number of needs are affected and must be considered in developing an NDC that considers sectoral and local development priorities.

Civil society organizations (CSOs) are key actors in translating local needs to national demands. When we refer to CSOs in the paper at hand, we understand them as the representatives of "climate-active civil society". These non-governmental and non-profit organizations act publicly and aim at influencing political decisions. These associations and organizations deal either specifically with issues related to climate change, or at least, treat it as a cross-cutting topic⁴.

On the following pages, we elaborate on the opportunities of civil society engagement for an ambitious NDC-update and highlight the unique role of civil society actors within the process. Then, we raise challenges and barriers that may hinder meaningful involvement of civil society in the NDC process. By taking into account the highlighted opportunities and challenges, we make recommendations how a participatory and efficient NDC-update process should look like to achieve more ambitious climate action.

2 *NewClimate, 2019a*

3 *COBENEFITS, 2017*

4 *Kovac et al. (2019) refer to Brunnengraber et al. (2005) and Brunnengraber, A. (2011)*

OPPORTUNITIES

Connecting link

A strong linkage between international commitments like the NDC and sub-national realities is a crucial prerequisite for implementing sound climate policy and to assure acceptance for climate policy measures among the population. Local and national CSOs can provide that link.

Local communities are the ones who suffer from the impacts of climate change. They are key actors in the implementation of mitigation and adaptation measures and to prevent irrevocable loss and damage. Civil society engagement is, therefore, vital to elaborate international commitments that are grounded in people's realities. NGOs play a key role, as they link the local with the national level – assuming there is a

participatory NDC-update process in place and CSOs are provided with the necessary resources to engage in them.

The figure below, created by the IPCC (2012), addresses the role of stakeholders in adaptation and disaster risk management. However, it could also be translated to the functions of stakeholders in processes like planning for the NDC. What the illustration shows is that CSOs act as pivotal entities in the planning of sound climate policy. The reason lies in their connections with (inter) national institutions as well as local communities. As local needs, aspirations and culture feed into the (inter)national goals, the implementation of international commitments also links to the local level in the form of projects and concrete climate action.

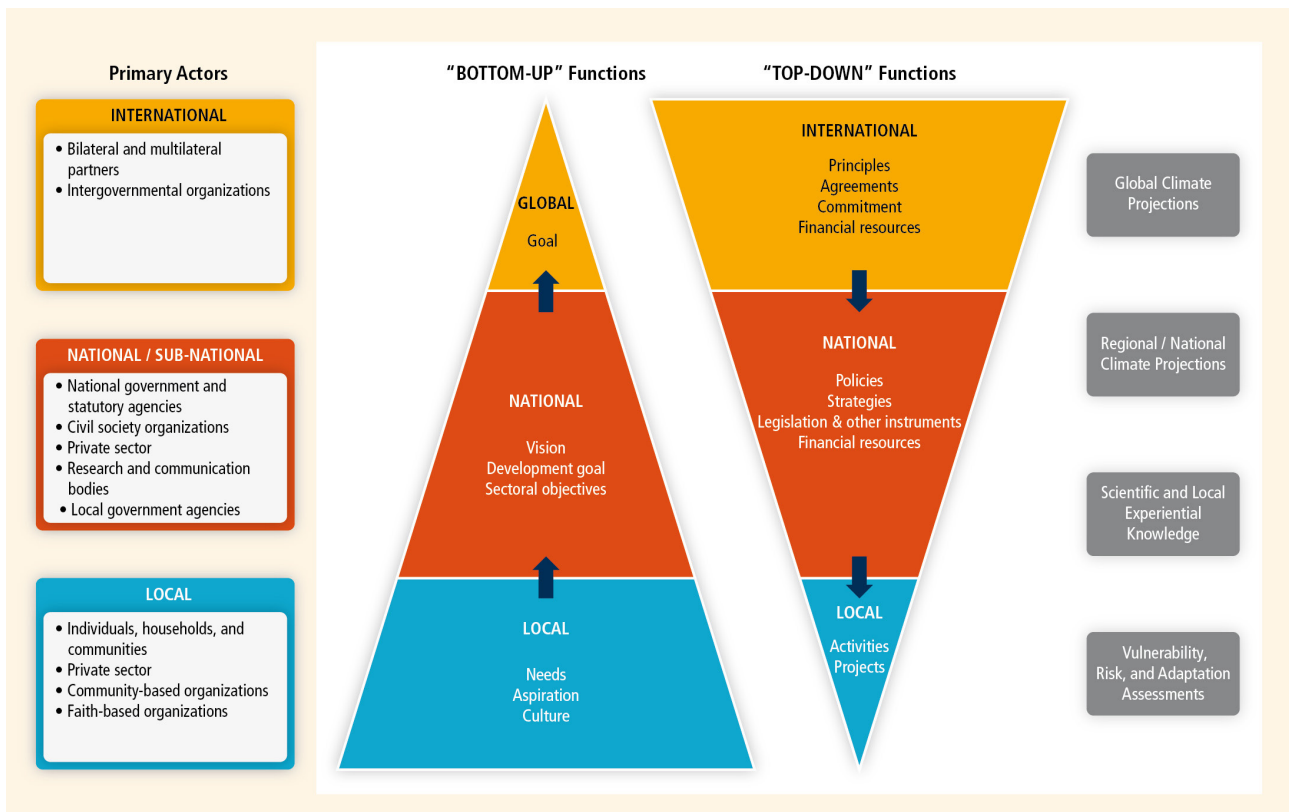


Figure 1: CSOs play an intermediary role – not only in disaster risk management (IPCC, 2012: 346)

Local and specific knowledge

From our experience, CSOs bring some of the necessary prerequisites to raise climate ambition. One of their strengths is the ability to channel the views of their members and (marginalized) societal groups. They enjoy trust and support by the people whose needs and culture they represent. That way the great diversity of cultures is reflected at the national and also the international level. Thus, the specific local circumstances are made visible and challenge (inter) national developments. By representing the diversity of society, CSOs complement on modern representative democracies and counteract the alienation of citizens from political processes⁵.

Knowledge about community development needs, geographically dependent climate vulnerabilities and location sensitive solutions for mitigation and adaptation policies and measures are precious assets of civil society organizations that need to be taken into account in planning inclusive and ambitious NDCs. We learned throughout the project in Colombia, Georgia and Ukraine that there are no "one size fits all" solutions to climate change and that civil society organizations and their networks are in a unique position to take all relevant and specific circumstances into account and integrate them in truly effective measures to combat climate change.

Intermediary player

What we can take away from the new societal climate movements led by the youth is that civil society groups are able to sensitize a wide range of societal groups about climate change issues. CSOs mediate among the great variety of individual actors and, therefore, are able to overcome sectoral barriers and conflicting interests among societal groups much easier than public administrations⁶.

Provision of support

In line with civil society participation in planning processes, the central role of CSOs contributes to a successful and more dynamic implementation of national climate policy. Furthermore, civil society is able to support local administrations in the phases of implementation and provide technical assistance, e.g. in carbon accounting and/or the facilitation of the NDC update process. The agreed responsibilities can empower the involved actors and help them to raise their reputation.

Incorporate co-benefits

The implementation of climate action that takes into account local concerns and capacities of communities contributes to their empowerment and to local socio-economic co-benefits like "public health [improvements from clean energy sources], access to electricity, investment opportunities resulting from plummeting costs for renewable electricity, and local value-creation"⁷. Cooperating with and involving stakeholders who are affected by and benefit from climate change mitigation can help identify local and regional co-benefits of mitigation actions. In addition, the socio-economic co-benefits of ambitious climate policies improve people's livelihoods and contribute towards meeting the SDGs (e.g. access to energy) and provide incentives for civil society to contribute to climate policy.

5 Council of Europe, 2015

6 *Ibid.*

7 COBENEFITS, 2017

CHALLENGES

Civil society and stakeholder engagement is a challenging task taking into account the broad array of actors that are affected by national climate policy. Participation processes and consultations can be time-consuming and resource-intensive. An efficiently planned and applied participation process is, therefore, able to capture people's and experts' contributions to climate policy and save resources.

Since countries are at different stages of institutionalized stakeholder participation, the outlined challenges may not apply to each one of them to the same extent. However, the highlighted challenges underline the wide range of difficulties that can arise in the process of engaging civil society in NDC revision processes:

Transparency, clear and timely communication

The only way to ensure accountability among stakeholders is to communicate clearly and in a fully transparent manner. From our experience in Germany and in our partner countries, CSOs tend to face short deadlines, a lack of information and data as well as uncertainty about when and at which point they will be able to contribute. Since climate policies like climate action plans and the NDC are complex documents, stakeholders – CSOs in particular – need time to elaborate on specific issues to be able to contribute thoroughly. Accountability through transparency is a key element in achieving acceptance among stakeholders and especially civil society.

Accessibility

Transparent communication also contributes to the accessibility of participatory processes. As the Council of Europe puts it, processes for participation need to be open and accessible, based on agreed parameters for participation⁸. If invitations to consultations and participation processes are not distributed widely, some relevant stakeholders are hindered from taking

part. Access to process-related information and the use of native languages are key factors for allowing meaningful participation. Given the plurality of society, the great diversity of social groups and their representatives needs to be considered.

Lack of capacities

A central challenge to participation in planning processes is the lack of capacities of some relevant stakeholders. On the one hand, it might take time and resources to overcome knowledge gaps and foster awareness of the issue, since the NDC per se is a complex issue. On the other hand, the lack of financial resources hinders CSOs in elaborating on a specific topic. From our experience, even if CSOs possess valuable ideas and knowledge, they might often be constrained by a lack of financial resources from further contributing to the political discourse. That means, it should carefully be identified whether and where knowledge and/or financial gaps have to be closed.

Often, some stakeholders are unaware of policies that will affect them. This also holds true for NDC planning and implementation. Crucial links between mitigation and adaptation measures, SDGs and socio-economic co-benefits are lacking, but are necessary to address relevant stakeholders. Particularly, civil society actors are not aware of the relationship between climate action and potential co-benefits like increased health brought about by shifting to renewable energies.

Resources

Time and financial resources are crucial factors in designing engagement processes. Despite the many benefits that inclusive civil society engagement brings during the development and implementation of the NDC, the costs of such a comprehensive process have to be taken into consideration and must not be underestimated.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Civil society engagement holds many opportunities for ambitious mitigation targets, as outlined above, and ensures acceptance among the population. Aiming at sound NDC submissions every five years, which can comprehensively be translated into domestic implementation, local stakeholders must be engaged early in the NDC planning process to secure their contributions⁹. It is crucial to go beyond just informing stakeholders about the NDC process and/or decisions that have been made by introducing inclusive processes of consultation and participation right from the beginning.

Since it is a demanding task to effectively involve civil society in the planning and implementation of NDCs, certain elements must be considered.

Resources

As introduced above, civil society engagement comes with costs that must not be underestimated. For instance, the review and meaningful incorporation of stakeholder contributions and comments takes time, while the facilitation of stakeholder meetings requires financial resources. However, the strength of CSOs is their locally routed expertise that greatly improves climate policy. International donors and networks like the NDC Partnership support the process of NDC enhancement. This platform helps to coordinate demands by parties requesting support and helps to route the provisions¹⁰. A comprehensive participatory process within the support schemes that engages relevant stakeholders and civil society must be part of those support programmes and can be explicitly requested.

In addition to raising the necessary resources and to make good use of them, ongoing planning processes in national climate policy must be aligned to raise efficiency. The enhanced transparency framework

makes it possible for parties to merge their national communications into one single document as applicable¹¹. Not only can the submissions be merged, the processes can also be combined. For instance, the signatory countries to the European Energy Community Treaty are asked to submit a National Energy and Climate Plan (NECP) to the Energy Community Council. The preparations and consultations do not need to be duplicated, but rather combined to save resources and allocate expertise where it is needed¹². So, efforts to improve participation of civil society and other stakeholders can be aligned likewise.

Furthermore, CSOs can also support authorities operationally to facilitate trainings and consultation for stakeholders of the NDC process and, thereby, relieve local and national governments who might struggle with personnel constraints. Obligatory financial compensation must be considered. A valuable side effect would be that CSOs gain in reputation and raise their professionalism by taking on responsibilities. In this way, the sustainability of cooperation and partnerships can be secured.

Stakeholder mapping

Mapping of relevant stakeholders should include relevant civil society actors, i.e. civil society organizations at the local and national level as well as individual experts in relevant fields of potential mitigation¹³. At the local level, civil society actors already practice climate-friendly solutions in the field of e.g. sustainable transportation and agriculture. Their specific knowledge needs to be acknowledged in planning and implementing the NDC. So that their particular expertise can be taken into account, these civil society stakeholders have to be identified, their capacities strengthened where needed, and their access to the NDC update process ensured.

9 Vener, J. et al., 2019

10 Bread for the World, 2017

11 NewClimate, 2019a and 2019b

12 Ibid.

13 Carbon Market Watch, 2018: 9

Compiling a comprehensive list of stakeholders, that can later be reduced, is always a good start. Local and marginalized groups must be included, as well as experts in specific areas and local issues. CSOs are often integrated very well in their respective networks. That means they can support the mapping of relevant actors, particularly in rural areas, even though nationally active CSOs are usually based in the capital. Consulting CSOs at this stage helps open the field in the mapping process.

The plurality in society must be reflected properly in the NDC process to reach ambitious and accepted climate policy. That means the cultural and societal diversity needs to be reflected in a comprehensive selection process.

Accessibility and capacities

After a comprehensive and transparent selection of relevant civil society actors has been conducted, the potential contributors' capacities have to be assessed and built where needed. Efforts can be aligned by offering trainings for more than one group of stakeholders across sectors and institutions, including governmental officials. By doing so, accessibility and the relations between stakeholders might already improve at this stage.

Civil society organizations tend to depend on external funding to be able to participate in trainings and meetings. Local expertise and knowledge from marginalized groups, however, is explicitly needed. We learned from the cooperation with our partners in Colombia, Georgia and Ukraine that the participation of representatives of (local) CSOs enriches the discourse. To ensure their participation, travel expenses must be covered, which is a negligible expense taking into consideration the benefits gained from this.

One premise for involving civil society actors must be the usage of appropriate, native language at all stages of the participation process. Stakeholders and civil society actors must be able to follow the discussions and understand the documents. The documents, thus, should be "translated, adapted and interpreted in writing or verbally"¹⁴, so that all participants can understand them. Language is a key factor in ensuring inclusivity, particularly for marginalized groups.

Agreed responsibilities

The next step towards meaningful civil society engagement is to share responsibilities with the engaged individuals or units to clarify roles and structure before the actual participation process. We learned from our implementing partners in Ukraine that the roles are inappropriately distributed among the stakeholders. Since science in the field of climate change is underrepresented in Ukraine, NGOs like our implementing partners Ecoaction involuntarily fill this gap to provide current research to climate discourse.

Clarity about roles and responsibilities right from the beginning of the NDC process contributes to a positive reputation of the respective actors. Structures, rules and expectations should be agreed on. In this way, all stakeholders understand how they can participate and how decisions will be made¹⁵.

To maintain meaningful cooperation, key champions of civil society can be involved closely to help build a bridge between the interests of government and society. A balanced representation of gender and marginalized groups needs to be taken into account.

14 *EUflegt, 2014*

15 *Ibid.*

Plan practices of engagement

A thoroughly organized engagement plan should be developed and regularly updated, which outlines the timeline and practices of engagement. Stakeholders, especially civil society organizations, need to be informed in due time about when and at which point of the process they are able to contribute.

A combination of different forms of consultation, cooperation and participation should be ensured online and offline. Though online consultations require technical equipment for the participants – which risks excluding some parts of society –, it might allow the involvement of people in remote areas with ease. It needs to be taken into consideration that the amount of contributions might be very high and reviewing and assessing them is a challenging task.

Policy dialogue and face-to-face meetings like working groups assure enriched discussions and possibly lead to creative strategies with high acceptance among the participants. Formats like focus group discussions and scenario workshops allow the facilitators to capture civil society input and constantly improve the participation formats (internal learning)¹⁶.

The choice of appropriate formats and/or methods depends on the specific circumstances and includes factors like the number of identified contributors to the process and their level of expertise. A coordinating facilitator is able to establish trustful cooperation with the participating stakeholders. In any case, preparatory trainings should be planned well in advance and background information must be provided to achieve the same level of knowledge. Formats of contribution and involvement must always be adapted to the capacities of marginalized groups. Establishing working groups on specific issues (e.g. sectors, adaptation, loss&damage) is recommended when CSOs and local experts are not able to contribute on every issue.

The participating actors should agree on next-step actions to keep the dialogue ongoing, while recommendations and contributions should always be summarized and fed back to the group of participants as a practice of transparent communication.

Timeline of engagement

In the course of revising the NDC, countries face predetermined submission dates which must be taken into consideration. The NDC update will be due every 5 years – starting in 2020. Additionally, in a shifted 5-year cycle, the global stocktake gathers national carbon inventories to check on the success of emission reduction pathways. The first global stocktake shall be conducted until 2023. By then, the development of the new NDC documents should be prepared in cooperation with relevant stakeholders and civil society during the remaining two years' timeframe. At this point, the transparent disclosure of relevant data is a must in order to allow participants in the update process to thoroughly prepare their contributions and support the elaboration of ambitious climate action. Clear communication about deadlines is vital. A precise schedule should be disseminated broadly to inform the stakeholders following the principles of accessibility.

While some actors are able to contribute already during the carbon inventory for the global stocktake, other stakeholders might need their capacities built and knowledge gaps bridged during that time. Trainings and workshops need to be provided before the actual consultation process for the updated NDC document begins.

Partnerships and alliances with civil society actors as well as other stakeholders should be established early to sustain close cooperation and ensure working platforms to prepare for the upcoming NDC revisions. So, by sharing the effort, NDCs can be enhanced.

Institutionalization

Engaging civil society is a promising but also challenging task in the course of updating the NDC. Coordinating the plurality of stakeholders and providing a successful policy dialogue requires many resources. In order to use these resources in a sustainable way, the process should be institutionalized. Establishing partnerships and coalitions among stakeholders and governmental bodies is the first step towards sustainable and trustful cooperation.

Therefore, employing a facilitation office that coordinates stakeholders, assigns responsibilities, and organizes dialogue, inputs, as well as related timelines regarding international submission processes is recommended. Civil society and contributing stakeholders need a focal point of contact where they can request needed information.

Embracing transparency promotes civil society's trust and understanding. Most importantly, recommenda-

tions and contributions need to be incorporated in the end. It will severely endanger the relationship between government and civil society, if government ultimately decides to not include the recommendations of civil society. The further the process advances, the more important it will become to clearly communicate considered proposals. This includes clarity and argumentation about the pieces that were not considered in the NDC.

Considering these recommendations, an inclusive and more efficient NDC update process will lead to ambitious targets and corresponding climate action. This implies acknowledging the opportunities of a participatory process in order to engage relevant stakeholders – including civil society – and incorporating their contributions. To do so, we recommend taking the extra mile in regards of additional time and resources to benefit from ambitious climate policy that gains broad acceptance among the relevant stakeholders and civil society.

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Bund für Umwelt und Naturschutz Deutschland e.V. (BUND)
Friends of the Earth Germany
Kaiserin-Augusta-Allee 5
10553 Berlin, Germany
www.bund.net

Chief editor: Antje von Broock (V.i.S.d.P.)

Contact: Severin Ettl
(severin.ettl@bund.net)

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