



**PUT PEOPLE  
IN POWER**

**Strengthening civil society in the  
implementation of national climate policy**



**Fight for your right to environmental information, participation and access to justice and adequate spaces for civic engagement!**



## Dear reader,

Our planet is facing a life threatening climate crisis. At the same time, it is evident there is a massive gap in overall climate ambition as well as in the implementation of existing pledges and goals. For the first time, the mean global average temperature exceeded the limit of 1.5°C above pre-industrial level for a period of 12 months in a row<sup>1</sup>. The latest estimates by the 2023 UNEP Emissions Gap Report show that current policies will limit global warming to 3°C as emissions set a new record globally<sup>2</sup>. This estimate does not take into account that all too often climate policy is not only insufficiently ambitious but also inadequately implemented. For example, Germany has failed to meet its own climate targets several years in a row<sup>3</sup>.

We have concluded that civil society plays a vital role in tackling the climate crisis by actively contributing to the development and implementation of effective and long-lasting climate policies. People's participation is essential in a democratic system, as it ensures accountability, promotes human rights, and empowers people to shape decisions that impact their lives.

Civil society organisations (CSOs) also serve as “watchdogs” and advocate for a fair socio-ecological transformation. Their deep understanding of societal needs and values enables them to represent those who might otherwise be overlooked. Strengthening their role in climate policy enables them to be key advocates for effective climate action and to work towards a more sustainable future that aligns with local needs<sup>4</sup>.

Here, we gather experiences and findings from a project led by BUND (Friends of the Earth Germany) that aimed to strengthen civil society in the implementation of climate policy. With the project partners from the Independent Institute on Environmental Issues (UfU), The Greens Movement of Georgia as well as Green Alternative in Georgia, Ecoaction in Ukraine, and Censat Agua Viva in Colombia, we have been working on involving civil society in climate policy decision making.

Through many years of experience and commissioned studies as part of the project, we have identified structural challenges in putting Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) into practice and have examined the role of civil society in shaping climate policy across various levels.

Enjoy reading!



## Challenges you should know

The implementation of NDCs and a meaningful involvement of civil society are two key factors for achieving adequate climate actions towards climate justice. The growing gap between set climate targets and actual policy implementation widens the emissions gap and thus injustices. Furthermore, the contradiction between goals and actual climate action undermines trust in the NDC process.

**Our case studies in five different countries<sup>5</sup> have revealed a number of structural barriers that hinder the effective implementation of NDCs:**

**Data Discrepancies:** Significant gaps in disaggregated data and inconsistencies between national and local data hinder transparent reporting and monitoring of climate action. This disparity poses a challenge to achieving transparent implementation of NDCs and monitoring climate action progress.

**External Funding Dependency:** Often, climate policy development and climate action heavily rely on international funding due to weak state institutions. Climate finance is currently underrepresented. A lack of financial resources significantly hinders the implementation of effective climate policies.

**Shifting State Priorities:** There is a notable shift in state priorities away from climate action, leading to the expansion or lock-in of the fossil fuel industry in several cases. Political will plays a crucial role in drafting adequate climate targets, but shifting priorities pose challenges to climate policy implementation.

**Vertical and Horizontal Incoherencies:** There are structural discrepancies between national climate strategies and between national and local climate targets. Communication issues between different line ministries result in incoherencies and ineffective climate action.

**Knowledge and Awareness gaps:** Deficiencies in climate knowledge and awareness are observed at all government levels, leading to low representation of climate issues in development strategies. This often results in policies that do not fully take into account local realities.



**In Colombia, civil society is fighting for a future without fracking.**



Beyond structural barriers that impede the comprehensive implementation of NDCs, civil society actors face significant obstacles in participating in climate policy decision-making. Collaborating with civil society not only boosts transparency and accountability but also brings in diverse perspectives and local expertise vital for creating effective and equitable solutions to the pressing challenges of the climate crisis.

**Nevertheless, civil society continues to encounter significant legal, structural and procedural impediments that obstruct their essential participation. In this context, the following barriers are encountered<sup>4</sup>:**

**Shrinking Civic Space:** In many countries, civil society faces a restriction in its freedom to open and democratic participation, hindering their ability to engage effectively<sup>6</sup>.

**Security and Safety Concerns:** Civil society, especially environmental and human rights defenders (HRD), faces significant threats to their safety in some regions. Colombia leads in the sad ranking of deadliest countries for HRDs<sup>7</sup>.

**Limited Resources:** CSOs often struggle with insufficient funding, staff, and access to necessary information, which can limit their capacity to contribute meaningfully to climate policy processes. Also, involving stakeholders in decision-making takes time and human resources on the government side to be effective.

**Legal and Institutional Barriers:** Challenges such as the lack of implementation of international treaties like the Aarhus Convention or the Escazu Agreement impede civil society participation.

**Political Reluctance and Poor Governance:** A lack of political will to involve civil society and issues such as corruption or inefficient institutional coordination and inadequate structures for engaging CSOs can impede meaningful participation.

**Ineffective Participation Processes:** Issues such as non-inclusive, opaque, or poorly executed participation procedures reduce the effectiveness of civil society involvement.

**Awareness and Capacity Gaps:** Limited awareness of participation rights and a lack of training or capacity development for both governmental officials and CSOs can prevent meaningful engagement in climate policy processes.



In Ukraine, even during war, civil society shows great resilience, as communities work together for a green recovery.

## Steps forward

We have come to the conclusion that it is crucial to eliminate structural barriers in order to accelerate the implementation of the NDCs. Civil society can play a key role in this effort. We recommend that governments speed up the implementation of the NDCs by focusing on the following aspects:

**Invest in robust and high-resolution data infrastructure!** Improving data collection mechanisms and establishing GHG inventories at both national and local levels are essential. A lack of accurate data leads to incorrect policy choices. For example, in Germany, a big underestimation of methane emissions from coal mining showed how important it is to have solid data<sup>8</sup>.

**Secure climate financing!** For many countries to take strong action on climate change, having enough funds available is essential. That's why the global goal of providing \$100 billion per year must be expanded rapidly and substantially. Additionally, the Loss and Damage Fund must be operational and promptly filled adequately.

**Create space for climate action and resist fossil fuel influence!** When considering funding for climate initiatives, prioritize opportunities for people to shape the discourse around climate and social justice instead of allowing the fossil fuel industry to dictate the narrative for short-term profit. A recent study highlighted that, from an economic perspective, the cost of climate impacts is much higher than investing in climate action<sup>9</sup>.

**Adopt a Climate Law!** Establishing climate laws facilitates better coordination both from national to local legislation and across sectors. Climate laws mandate the integration of NDCs into development strategies, ensuring that different entities collaborate and communicate effectively.

**Develop Capacities and Communicate!** Strengthen capacities of government officials for climate action by leveraging civil society's local knowledge and experience. Invest in climate education and awareness of both state employees and civil society to empower communities and individuals to contribute to and support sustainable climate initiatives.





**Promote Multilateral Collaboration!** Sharing knowledge and working together with other countries helps spread best practices and valuable insights. This includes regional projects, peer-to-peer learning, and partnerships within international facilities like the NDC partnership<sup>10</sup>, which helps coordinate and direct global support for tackling shared climate challenges.

**If we want for climate policies to be both adequate and fair, we need to engage civil society in a meaningful way. In order to enable people and organisations to actively take part, there are some basic requirements that need to be ensured by governments<sup>4</sup>:**

- **Secure Fundamental Requirements!** Civil society needs a safe and enabling environment to develop. This includes stability and peace, anti-corruption and transparency and security for environmental defenders
- **Adopt Coherent Legal Frameworks!** These laws need to protect civic space and ensure the right to a meaningful participation.
- **Build Continuous Governance!** These structures need to actively support civil society, for example through financial support, institutional cooperation and coordination.
- **Provide enabling capacity building!** Civil society actors need to be equipped with the skills and knowledge which are necessary to understand the political process and form and express their position.

- **Implement Inclusive and Transparent Participation Processes!** These need to be:

- **Inclusive:** when implementing a participation process, it is important to make sure that everyone who is affected by the issue is included. That is why a broad stakeholder mapping at the beginning of the process is important. Also, participants should be invited timely and be provided with translation and a barrier-free access.
- **At eye level:** it is important to build trust, respect and cooperation between all stakeholders involved. Therefore, it is not sufficient to merely inform people.
- **Transparent:** a clear mandate needs to define how decisions are being made. All relevant documents need to be freely accessible.
- **Enabling:** in order to enable civil society to actively and meaningfully participate, capacity building needs to be implemented and resources need to be made available to cover for potential costs and compensate work time.
- **Continuous:** participation processes need to be designed in a way that is binding and continuous. This needs to be actively supported through institutions.



## Endnotes

- 1 <https://climate.copernicus.eu/warmest-january-record-12-month-average-over-15degc-above-preindustrial>
- 2 United Nations Environment Programme (2023). Emissions Gap Report 2023: Broken Record – Temperatures hit new highs, yet world fails to cut emissions (again). Nairobi. <https://doi.org/10.59117/20.500.11822/43922>.
- 3 Umweltbundesamt. Treibhausgasreduzierungsziele Deutschlands, <https://www.umweltbundesamt.de/daten/klima/treibhausgasreduzierungsziele-deutschlands#internationale-vereinbarungen-weisen-den-weg>
- 4 See Donges, L., Stolpe, F., Sperfeld, F., Kovac, S. (2020): Civic Space for Participation in Climate Policies in Colombia, Georgia and Ukraine. Independent Institute for Environmental Issues. Berlin. ISBN 978-3-935563-42-0. <https://www.ufu.de/downloads/civic-space-for-participation-in-climate-policies-in-colombia-georgia-and-ukraine/>
- 5 For further details, see BUND (2023): Don't bypass people. Tracing NDCs to (local) climate action. Berlin, 2023. <https://www.bund.net/service/publikationen/detail/publication/dont-bypass-people-tracing-ndcs-to-local-climate-action/>
- 6 For further details on the shrinking civic space, see the CIVICUS Monitor which tracks civic space globally: <https://monitor.civicus.org/watchlist-march-2024/>
- 7 [https://monitor.civicus.org/globalfindings\\_2023/americas/](https://monitor.civicus.org/globalfindings_2023/americas/)
- 8 <https://ember-climate.org/insights/in-brief/de-undermines-cmm-emissions/>
- 9 <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41586-024-07219-0>
- 10 <https://ndcpartnership.org/>

