# P6.1-3 Role of Civil Society in Transition toward Low Carbon Society

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## Civil Society as a Major Stakeholder Category

There is a growing consensus among Low-carbon society (LCS) researchers that climate policy making process needs to be participative of all stakeholders and LCS actions must be compatible with the principles of sustainable development and equity. Furthermore, several country level LCS studies indicate roadmaps that require new technology innovations, new infrastructures, and changes in societal structures. Such radical changes in technologies and structures are not likely to come about by market forces alone but will necessitate active involvement of civil societies. This point has also been underscored by the sustainability science and transition governance researchers.

Civil society is one of the major categories of stakeholders, the others being the government and the business. These categories of stakeholders represent multiple interests in a society, like (i) economic growth and investment (business, government), (ii) poverty reduction, sustainable development, local environment and climate change adaptation (civil society, government), and (iii) climate change mitigation (international policy agencies, selected civil society groups). Successful climate policies will be those that satisfy stakeholders from the three categories and lie at the intersection of their interests.

## Role of Civil Societies in Developmental Policy

Civil society itself represents the interests of diverse stakeholders in a society, especially those whose interests may not be fully served by the market or the state. Such civil societies in different parts of the world are already raising voice against conflicts between economic interests and those of livelihoods, sustainable development and local environment, and demanding policy countermeasures that resolve such conflicts. For instance, there have been significant policy changes in India over the past several years driven by such forces. Stricter environmental approval mechanisms, pollution control laws and mandatory use of Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) in selected cities are examples of new policies that protect local environment. National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, Right to Information Act, mandatory public hearing step in industrial and developmental project approval process, stricter rehabilitation mechanisms for displaced people, agro-cooperatives and micro-credit norms are examples of new policies that protect livelihoods.

## Role of Civil Societies in Climate Policies

A key challenge for climate policy is to identify synergistic interests of various civil society groups with the economy and align mitigation strategies with them. This challenge entails several tasks – to identify major civil society interests and their concerns, possible climate mitigation solutions that can simultaneously address those concerns, potential barriers to implementing them, and strategies to overcome those barriers. The rest of this abstract illustrates how these tasks can be sketched for a given society.

To take the example of India, Table 1 lists some of the major civil society groups, their interests, potential climate change mitigation options that could simultaneously meet their interests, and major barriers to implementing such options.

Table 1. Major civil society groups, their concerns, low-carbon options, and barriers

| Stakeholder group | Major interests or concerns | Potential synergy with climate actions | Major barriers |
|---|---|---|---|
| Urban poor and slum dwellers (vendors, hawkers, small shop/ factory workers, etc.) | Access to housing, clean water, energy, sanitation, etc.; Access to economic opportunities; Threat of displacement from commercial projects that require urban land | Small scale renewable energy; Water/ waste recycling; Participation in low-carbon urban infrastructure supply and maintenance | Scarce financial and other resources; Weak institutional and market support; Poor say in urban planning process |
| Rural poor in forests and hills – tribal communities | Access to economic opportunities; Threat of displacement from commercial (mining and other) projects that require forests, land and water | Local renewable energy; Participation in forest conservation and sustainable forest and mining based industries | Scarce financial and other resources; Weak institutional and market support; Poor bargaining control over forest land, water and mineral resources |
| Rural poor in agricultural areas – landless and small farmers | Access to cost effective farming systems and other economic opportunities; Threat of displacement from commercial projects that require land and water | Local renewable energy; Participation in sustainable agriculture and agro based industries | Scarce financial and other resources; Weak institutional and market support; Poor bargaining control over farming land and water resources |
| Rural poor in coastal areas – fishing communities | Access to cost effective fishing systems and other economic opportunities; Threat of displacement from commercial projects that require coastal land and water; Threat of displacement from climate change impacts | Local renewable energy; Participation in sustainable fishing and related industries | Scarce financial and other resources; Weak institutional and market support; Poor bargaining control over coastal land and water resources |
| Urban middle and upper classes | Economic growth; Urban infrastructure (transport, energy and water) capacity and efficiency; Urban environmental pollution | Public transport; Low-carbon transport technologies; Low-carbon energy; Recycling and waste handling | Low awareness of benefits of low-carbon and sustainable systems |
| Rural middle and upper classes | Economic growth; Rural infrastructure (transport, energy and water) capacity and efficiency; Infrastructure (water and energy) support for agriculture and agro-based industries | Public transport systems; Decentralised and renewable energy; Water harvesting and recycling; Sustainable agriculture | Low awareness of benefits of low-carbon and sustainable systems |

The next tasks are to identify common policy targets and the role of civil societies in the target setting process; design new institutional structures and role of civil societies in those structures; and finally, formulate specific operational strategies for each sector and identify role of civil societies in those strategies. The operational strategies for each sector must cover the domains of technology and facilities, organisational structure, human resource capacity, and control systems. Table 2 shows broad example of such strategies for the energy sector.

**Conclusion**

The radical and fundamental changes in societies, institutional structures, technology and management systems in order to transition toward LCS require active role of civil societies. These roles have to be formally recognised and designed for in several stages, like:

- As participants in institutions and processes for target setting, designing, assessing and implementing low-carbon strategies and projects;
- As watchdogs to monitor design and implementation of low-carbon projects; and
- As agents of change, and therefore, participants in LCS research process itself.

Table 2. Broad climate mitigation strategies for energy sector synergistic with interests of civil societies and economic development

| Operational domain | Broad characteristics | Role of civil societies |
|---|---|---|
| Technology | Small scale, modular, renewable energy technologies that fit with local resource base (solar PV, solar thermal, wind, biomass, etc.) | Economic. assessment<br>Environment assessment<br>Climate mitigation assessment |
| Facilities | R&D, component manufacture (centralised);<br>Module & system assembly (decentralised);<br>Distribution of components, modules (logistics);<br>Sales, installation, maintenance (local);<br>Integrated management of local natural resources (local) | Economic. assessment<br>Environment assessment<br>Climate mitigation assessment |
| Organisational structures | Centralised (R&D, component manufacture);<br>Decentralised (assembly, distribution, installation, maintenance, natural resource management) | Organising local participation, e.g. cooperatives |
| HR capacity | Skills for assembly, installation, maintenance;<br>Skills for environment and climate change impact assessment | Awareness, Training |
| Control systems | Economic performance;<br>Environment, climate mitigation, sustainable development performance | Progress monitoring |