

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change states that Parties should protect the climate system for the benefit of present and future generations of humankind, on the basis of equity and in accordance with their common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities. However, the current climate change discourse, including the way mitigation and adaptation measures are designed and appraised, tends to emphasize environmental, economic or technological inputs and costs. As a result, current policy responses may not fully address their negative impacts on people nor take full advantage of opportunities to reach their objectives. Peoples and society are often *assumed* beneficiaries of and active participants in international efforts and national policies. A people-centred approach, considering the social, economic, and behavioral aspects of the human condition, is essential to actualizing those assumptions, and to the success of climate change policies.

Why Integrate Social Dimensions into Climate Change Policy?

Climate change clearly *impacts people*, and response measures *depend on people* to be successful. Thus, the social dimensions of climate change—the interplay between climate as a phenomenon and *people*, as victims and agents of climate change—are critical to the success of climate policy. People are the end-users of climate technology and promulgators of climate solutions. Practically speaking, the success of global climate responses for both mitigation and adaptation can only be improved by, and may very well depend on, integrating social dimensions alongside technology, infrastructure, environmental science and other predominant considerations.

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) continues to house the international process in which the evolving climate change agenda is discussed and determined. And, while limited in scope, social dimensions of climate change can be found in this framework, as well as other international instruments such as Agenda 21 and the Hyogo Framework for Action. Furthermore, Parties to the Conventions have a duty to safeguard the rights of their citizens as affirmed, most essentially, in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and reaffirmed in additional instruments, including the Convention for the Elimination for all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Convention of the Rights of the Child, and the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

If principles are too abstract an ideal, the practicalities of policies also beg for the inclusion of social dimensions. The success of climate responses will depend, after all, in great part on the resilience of people, opportunities they have, and the choices they make. Strategies designed and implemented without considerations of the very people who will interact with and depend on them can undermine the strategies' success. Conversely, integrating social dimensions at all levels of analysis, design, and implementation can lead to more efficient and effective results on the ground. For instance, while physical infrastructures influence human behavior, human behavior is the social driver that shapes and reinforces patterns of design, use and consumption. Feedback loops of peoples' actions and the environment can be found everywhere driving car production or use of mass transit; options for employment and livelihoods; consumption of meat-heavy or more vegetarian diets; material consumption or leisure time being viewed as a symbol of wealth; choosing to have many children, few or none; migration decisions; construction of mammoth or small homes. The circumstances that allow for or even encourage low-emission choices—realization of rights, access to information, participation in decision-making processes, and freedom from extreme poverty—can promote positive feedback loops as well as curtail negative feedback loops. Thus, policies that capitalize on the people's role as drivers in green-house gas emissions are bound to be more effective.

How to integrate Social Dimensions into Climate Change Policies?

Steps to integrate social dimensions in climate change policy cycle should be undertaken, most simply, during the *assessment* of the issue; the *process* of policy development; and the *results* — the monitoring and evaluation of impacts, and relevant restructuring of policy. This is in alignment with well respected procedural principles in international development of: inclusive and participatory processes; non-discrimination and equity; human rights and empowerment; and transparency and accountability.

Specific recommendations include:

1. **Develop more frequent and better informed social impact assessments.** Social impact assessments are often not conducted in tandem with the design and implementation of climate policies, and thus the policies omit essential community input into potential constraints and opportunities. Ensure that social impact assessments are conducted throughout each stage of programme and policy development, are evidence-based incorporating socio-economic and demographic data, and are not just a one-off process.
2. **Promote inter-ministerial policy coordination/dialogue.** At present, Ministries often work in silos, and in so doing, neglect to fully address the complexities of climate impacts and co-benefits. At national and global level, fora must be made available for country Ministers to dialogue about climate policies and ensure that their expertise is incorporated into global and national climate policies.
3. **Identify relevant research gaps and prioritize areas in which to bolster research.** These may include demographic-based disaster forensics to better understand vulnerability; behavior, choice and consumption studies to understand underlying social drivers; deeper understanding of which social assessment tools are most appropriate for various contexts and how to improve their use in practice; etc.
4. **Ensure safeguards are in place to protect the interests of the most vulnerable when fashioning climate solutions.** Explore the underlying causes of vulnerability and adaptive capacity, and design policies taking into account those characteristics, so as to benefit or not adversely impact the most vulnerable. This will help ensure that the large infrastructural changes necessary for low-carbon growth do not exacerbate societal inequities.
5. **Invest in human capital.** Climate policies and programmes have the potential to empower people as agents of change and innovators. Policymakers need to advance education and skills-building opportunities throughout the implementation of climate policies, ensuring that people are equipped with the tools to devise their own solutions and innovations, and that the most vulnerable are empowered to hedge against risk. These investments will in turn generate many other benefits.
6. **Develop and use Social Dimensions Responsive Budgeting in climate finance at national and global levels.** Draw upon existing budgeting tools, such as gender-responsive budgeting or similar tools related to health and children, to inform the development of a social dimensions budgeting tool. This tool could be used to ensure equitable climate-related budgeting; and track how climate finance benefits or possibly undermines social progress on which climate solutions rely.

Example / Scenario: Aquifer saltwater intrusion – the entry of saltwater into freshwater aquifers (from sea level rise or hurricane/cyclone-induced saltwater entry) – which climate forecasts predict that will become more frequent.

A response without Social Dimensions would include:

- a lack of community participation in decision-making, resulting in confusion or unrest when the response is implemented;
- relocation –though sometimes necessary, there are alternatives to test out first;
- rush into desalination, a costly endeavour;
- neglect of social feedback loops driven by water practices;
- implementation of subsidies that exacerbate the situation.

A social dimensions-sensitive approach could feature:

- prior environmental and social impact assessments that establish social impact priorities;
- background analysis of the drivers and impacts, using available causality assessment tools, in order to identify the problem correctly;
- meaningful engagement with communities to establish a basis for better solutions and informed consent;
- Cost-benefit analysis including the costs and benefits of priority social dimensions;
- Social safeguards put in place that limite negative impacts due to response measures.