



Executive summary

Southern voices on climate policy choices:
analysis of and lessons learned from civil society
advocacy on climate change

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Climate change is happening now and is leading to a number of impacts, which are particularly detrimental to the world's poorest and most vulnerable communities. Governments at every level are responsible for helping communities respond to these changes, and yet governments often only take action when under pressure from civil society. Civil society therefore has a key role to play, both in terms of raising awareness about climate change at local and national levels and also helping governments, donors and international organisations plan for a climate change constrained future.

Increasingly, non-government organisations and other stakeholders have been coming together at the national level to form civil society networks in some of the countries that are most affected by climate change. These networks have been involved in a wide range of activities to raise awareness about climate change, support climate change adaptation activities that benefit the most vulnerable, develop low-carbon development pathways to help mitigate climate change and improve local livelihoods, conduct research and disseminate results, build capacity on climate change and influence government planning processes at a variety of levels through a multitude of advocacy activities.

Civil society has also come together at the regional level in some parts of the world. For example Climate Action Network Latin America, Climate Action Network South Asia and Sustainability Watch Latin America all operate at regional levels.

These civil society networks have directed much of their advocacy efforts on particular government policies or actions, but also on international processes, donors and in some cases the private sector. Some of these advocacy activities have been hugely successful, whilst others came across challenges and hurdles that not everyone foresaw as problematic. The authors hope that in collecting some of these stories together this report will inform, inspire and perhaps in some cases forewarn the growing body of dedicated climate change advocates around the world about what advocacy activities have worked, what ones haven't, and where others are focusing their efforts.

The report defines advocacy as "seeking with, and on behalf of, poor people to address the underlying causes of poverty, bring justice and support good development through influencing the policies and practices of the powerful" (Shaw, 2011) and describes advocacy initiatives that fall into two broad categories. Firstly, relationship-building, otherwise known as lobbying, which is about building relationships with people in authority and speaking with them about particular issues or community needs. Secondly, mobilising the public, otherwise known as campaigning, which is about raising

awareness about certain issues amongst the general public in order that this precipitates action due to increasing public demand.

Many advocacy activities described here acknowledge the central role played by the media in the context of climate change advocacy. Strong engagement with media can facilitate outreach to ordinary people who may not be aware of the issues highlighted, but also government officials and key decision-makers. Examples of media engagement include telling stories in a regular radio show or television programme, writing an article or letter for a newspaper or magazine or telling a journalist about a situation. More recently, forms of social media such as Facebook and Twitter have also played an important role in raising awareness of climate change issues. In order to effectively engage the media it is important to consider the target audience and adapt the media outputs accordingly. Media coverage of climate change issues has been increasing in vulnerable countries over the last few years and awareness of climate change issues amongst the media is rising, in part due to activities undertaken by civil society networks.

Civil society networks have been working to influence various international processes that have implications for climate change. Most, but not all efforts at the international level have focused on the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). In many instances civil society plays a key role as part of the government negotiating team at UNFCCC meetings, training or briefing negotiators before each negotiating session starts and supporting them throughout the negotiating process. Similarly, civil society organisations have played an important role providing feedback to civil society at large once international climate change meetings are over. Many attempts to influence government negotiating positions have also been made. This has been through general awareness-raising campaigns, and also more targeted approaches on issues such as REDD and international climate change funding.

Not all international climate change related advocacy has focused on the climate change negotiations. Networks are also focusing their efforts on the Rio+20 process and the Millennium Development Goals. A human rights based approach to international climate change negotiations is also being pursued outside the UNFCCC process by some networks.

Civil society networks have been broadening their scope for conducting advocacy work from international and national level activities to regional level policy arenas in recent years. Regions targeted include Latin America, South Asia, West Africa and East Africa where there are already a number of joint policy agreements in place covering issues such as planning for development and climate change, including low-carbon development, planning for the delivery of energy services at a regional level, planning for the regional management of climate change finance and trade. Not all of the regional policy arenas identified as important by civil society networks have climate change or low-carbon development as their primary focus. For example, the relationship between trade and climate change has been gaining increasing attention in South Asia.

Most civil society advocacy activities target national level government activities. This may be for a number of reasons, but does not necessarily mean that other stakeholder groups are not considered important advocacy targets by southern networks.

The national context in which civil society networks operate is varied. Countries such as Bangladesh and Vietnam have a number of policies and programmes directly addressing climate change and are ahead of other poor countries in terms of planning for climate change. Other countries, however, are less advanced in this context and have no climate change policies or national plans or strategies on climate change. In most countries, however, government levels of awareness and prioritisation of climate change issues has grown rapidly in recent years.

Networks have adopted a variety of approaches to influence their governments. They have played a key role in the context of holding government to account on promises or commitments made, drawing attention to any failures to meet these commitments and tackling the problems of implementation. Particular focus areas for advocacy efforts include disaster management, financing and REDD. Despite many successes, civil society has not always found it easy to influence government policy making and implementation as much as it would like. Material in this report makes it clear, however, that civil society has often been able to have a considerable impact on policy making and planning when relationships with government are good.

It is perhaps less common than advocacy activities that hold governments to account on commitments made, but there are also examples of networks providing praise where praise is due, for example if governments respond to public pressure, take strong positive action or honour their promises and commitments. And in some instances civil society activities have gone further than holding governments to account and have actively sought to change specific activities, policies or government decisions which are viewed as contrary to what is best for the country, the environment or those who are most vulnerable to climate change.

Civil society networks have been very active in the context of pushing for new laws, programmes, policies or strategies, or pressing governments to dedicate more resources to issues or places that they feel have been neglected. This can be by strengthening existing programmes, extending them to new areas or advocating for the ratification of existing global agreements. The range of subject areas on which these advocacy activities have focused has been broad and varies from the development of specific climate change units or policies, to policies relating to energy access, low-carbon development, disaster risk management, migration, REDD and wetland management. In some instances civil society has successfully advocated for new climate change units or policies at the highest possible government level. In other instances the advocacy efforts continue, and in some cases the networks acknowledge that they don't necessarily have skills and resources required to meet the advocacy objectives they would like.

Many civil society networks identified the lack of joined-up government responses to climate change as a key barrier to securing effective action at the national level. Despite the obvious links between disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation, for example, national policies are often poor at adopting an integrated approach to the two fields. Networks have therefore conducted advocacy work towards improving integration between different ministries, policies and government bodies responsible for climate change related issues. In many instances this has involved advocacy activities to integrate climate change into existing policies and processes, but it also involved advocacy work to integrate key stakeholders and other government processes and policies into emerging climate change policies.

Civil society plays a particularly important role in ensuring that poor and vulnerable people, who so often lack political voice themselves, are not forgotten in national policy making and planning processes. Much advocacy work has been undertaken to influence the degree to which these communities are part of climate change related policy making processes in different countries, and also likely to benefit from existing and emerging government strategies and plans on climate change. A common approach is to try to influence government policy by supporting demonstration projects and using lessons from these to feed into wider policy debates and decision making processes. Given that many network member NGOs have good links with poor communities and a strong development focus to their work, small existing or new development projects have been an obvious starting point for those wishing to integrate climate change issues into their activities, and they have consequently formed the basis for ensuing advocacy work.

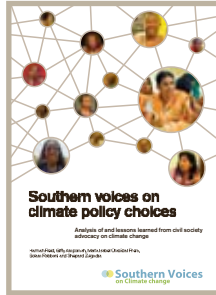
Not all network advocacy activities target the national government level. Local level advocacy activities target both local levels of government and also local communities themselves with a view to sharing lessons learnt and scaling up pilot initiatives to a wider scale. Activities targeting local levels of government can help raise awareness amongst government officials, and some projects tried to use advocacy activities conducted at the local level to scale up the level of influence to the national level.

Both donors and the private sector tend to develop their own agenda based on insufficient interaction with the affected or targeted communities. But resources – both human and financial – to cover all desirable advocacy actions across all sectors are limited so networks are forced to limit their activities and have tended to focus efforts on national governments and government processes. Donor funding for climate change activities has increased dramatically in recent years, however, and with more available funding, the need to influence how this funding is spent has grown. Many networks have therefore been working to influence the way in which multilateral and national donor funding agencies have provided in-country support. In some instances this has involved trying to advocate for more funding, and in others it has involved trying to influence how available funds are directed and what issues or sectors should be prioritised. In many cases civil society organisations can influence donor decisions by conducting research to identify critical areas which need donor support but currently lack it.

In some instances, civil society has adopted a more critical approach to in-country donor activities and tried to draw attention to actions or processes that fail to take account of certain vulnerable groups or important existing national policies and legislation, or plan to take the country down a certain route (such as taking on a large loan) which the network feels is not commensurate with sustainable development for the country or an appropriate response to climate change. World Bank activities are a case in point here and have come under fire from civil society networks in a number of countries. Processes supported by foundations and donors to put a value on reductions in carbon emissions for sale in the carbon market have also received intense civil society criticism in places.

Levels of climate change awareness within the private sector tend to be much lower than in government, the media and other groups. And the reputation that the private sector has for respecting sustainable development principles is not strong. The private sector has, however, much to contribute and many competencies relevant to both climate change adaptation and mitigation. Its strengths in technological innovation, the design of climate resilient infrastructure, improved information and marketing systems and the implementation of large-scale projects in partnership with government hold much potential in terms of helping people combat climate change. The need to engage more with the private sector is therefore acknowledged by many civil society groups. Influencing the private sector, however, is difficult because ultimately businesses are motivated primarily by profits as opposed to the view of electorates, philanthropy, sustainable development or poverty reduction. Many advocacy initiatives involving the private sector therefore involve civil society working together with (as opposed to campaigning against) businesses to have a positive impact, for example by providing incentives for sustainable or renewable energy projects that can benefit a community.

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