

Policy Briefing

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Inclusive Development of NDCs in Mozambique, South Africa and Zambia: Summary Findings

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Recommendations

- Governments must ensure that civil society actors are included effectively in the NDC revision process, drawing on insights from the 2020 round of NDC revisions.
- Civil society engagement in NDCs should go beyond virtual consultations and written inputs, to ensure the successful inclusion of marginalised communities.
- Governments must capacitate civil society on climate change and the Paris Agreement to ensure clear understanding of the content and importance of NDCs.
- Peer learning and regional collaboration on inclusive climate policy development must be supported to scale up good practices for robust NDC development.

Executive summary

Under the UN Framework Convention for Climate Change (UNFCCC), countries submit Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) outlining their plans to address climate change through adaptation and mitigation. However, the projected impact of current NDCs is insufficient to meet the Paris Agreement's goal of limiting global warming to below 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. In Africa, climate change poses a significant risk, especially for the most vulnerable communities, making public participation in NDC development crucial for rural communities that rely directly on natural resources. Civil society organisations (CSOs) play a key role in linking the ground-level realities of climate change with the world of climate policy and practice. South Africa, Zambia and Mozambique underwent NDC revisions in 2020 and made efforts to include civil society in the process. However, certain challenges limited the extent to which civil society, particularly marginalised communities, could participate effectively in these processes. To ensure the next round of NDC revisions are robust, inclusive and locally informed, governments must develop efficient engagement strategies to support CSOs in the NDC development process.

Introduction

Climate change poses a serious threat to African countries and requires the development of robust policies that consider the needs of the most vulnerable communities. Under the UNFCCC, countries are required to submit NDCs, which lay out adaptation and mitigation plans to meet the Paris Agreement's goal of limiting global warming to below 1.5°C above pre-industrialised levels. NDCs should be updated every five years and show increasing ambition to combat climate change. However, according to the first Global Stocktake,¹ which took place at the 28th Conference of the Parties (COP) in 2023, the current total impact of NDCs falls short of the Paris Agreement's goal. For example, forecasts predict that, by 2030, emissions will have had to drop by 43% from 2019 levels, yet current NDCs indicate only an 8% reduction.²

While NDCs must contain carefully formulated adaptation and mitigation plans, the process of their development is equally important. When all voices are accounted for in NDCs, intended climate interventions can address the needs of marginalised communities and draw on the insights from actors across society. Article 12 of the Paris Agreement requires all parties to enhance public participation and ensure access to relevant information. However, rural communities, which rely directly on natural resources for their livelihoods, are often excluded from the development of climate change policy owing to a lack of access to information, inadequate technical support and other barriers to

1 The Global Stocktake takes place every five years and is an established process under the Paris Agreement that reviews progress made toward meeting the long-term objectives of the Paris Agreement.

2 Taryn Fransen et al., "9 Things to Know about National Climate Change Plans", World Resources Institute, December 7, 2023.

participation.³ Civil society organisations⁴ are key in linking the ground-level realities of climate change with the world of climate policy and practice. They do this by advocating ambitious actions, creating awareness, supporting climate research and enhancing the resilience of vulnerable communities.⁵ In this regard, it is important that governments develop efficient engagement strategies to support CSOs' participation in the NDC development process.

This policy briefing provides essential recommendations for policymakers, informed by the findings of the project 'Strengthening Civil Society Voices on Natural Resources and Climate'. The project assessed civil society engagement in the 2020–2021 NDC review process, focusing on Mozambique, South Africa and Zambia. With the upcoming NDC revisions due in 2025, the policy briefing discusses the challenges experienced in the previous revision process, as well as possible solutions. It supports the development of inclusive and robust NDCs that protect the natural resource-based livelihoods of marginalised communities.

The importance of inclusivity

Stakeholder engagement in the NDC process is essential to ensure civil society buy-in for NDC implementation. In addition, creating inclusive engagement platforms sees to it that the concerns and needs of affected communities are articulated in NDCs. Such inclusion also helps ensure that domestic and international climate finance can be directed to where it is most needed. To facilitate the participation of civil society in the NDC development process, it is necessary to create multi-stakeholder forums and platforms that enable information sharing and awareness raising among different civil society groups. As such, developing clear and inclusive processes to revise and enhance NDCs is a vital first step in NDC development.⁶

During the 2020 NDC revision process, South Africa's Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE) held a series of meetings with civil society, including business and youth, to inform and validate the contents of the draft NDC. This included a road show to the country's nine provinces, as well as a month-long open call for written submissions on the draft NDC.⁷ Cross-departmental consultations were facilitated through the Inter-

3 Research findings presented in Hannah Sack et al., "Strengthening Civil Society Participation in the NDC Revision Process in Mozambique, South Africa and Zambia" (Forthcoming Paper, South African Institute of International Affairs, Johannesburg, 2024).

4 While the term "civil society" is often used to refer to all non-government actors, including the private sector and academia, in the context of this paper civil society is more narrowly defined as communities and the organisations formed to represent them, including CSOs, youth and gender groups, grassroots movements, alliances and coalitions.

5 SLYCAN Trust and Southern Voices on Adaptation, "Civil Society Engagement in the NDC Review Process" (Policy Brief, CARE Climate Justice Center, Den Haag, November 2020).

6 Romy Chevallier, "Enhancing Nationally Determined Contributions Across the SADC Region" (Policy Briefing 253, SAIIA, Johannesburg, 2021).

7 Chevallier, "Enhancing Nationally Determined Contributions".

governmental Committee on Climate Change, while the National Committee on Climate Change ran virtual consultations with broader partners.⁸ Key to the success of South Africa's NDC stakeholder engagement plan was the implementation of internal communication processes between government departments prior to the civil society outreach process.⁹ This ensured that all government bodies were aligned with and informed on the contents of the NDC before engaging with the broader public.

In Zambia and Mozambique, civil society networks have proven to be effective both in collating inputs from civil society on the contents of the NDC and in communicating relevant information about policy engagement opportunities. For example, the [Zambia Climate Change Network \(ZCCN\)](#) works with CSOs to coordinate inputs into important policy processes. During the previous NDC revision process, the ZCCN hosted two meetings to review the draft NDC and participated in NDC implementation framework processes for Zambia.¹⁰ Various platforms within the government also facilitate dialogue between it and communities. These include cluster advisory groups, provincial district development coordinating committees and sectoral technical working groups. In Mozambique, the National Platform of Civil Society on Climate Change currently coordinates activities across 20 CSOs, promoting awareness and understanding of climate issues and supporting engagement in the country's climate planning processes.¹¹ The Platform was engaged during the validation of Mozambique's most recent draft NDC, along with other civil society groups, including academia and the private sector.

While South Africa, Zambia and Mozambique all undertook stakeholder engagement plans during the 2020 NDC revisions, several challenges affected the extent to which civil society, in particular marginalised communities, could participate in these processes. To ensure the 2025 NDC revisions are robust, inclusive and locally informed, it is important to reflect on these challenges and identify possible solutions that seek to overcome barriers to participation in climate policy development.

Challenges impeding civil society engagement in the NDC process

Exclusion of marginalised communities

Owing to the onset of COVID-19, governments were generally unable to hold face-to-face consultations with civil society during the 2020 revision process. While virtual and, in some cases, hybrid consultations with civil society were held, this excluded marginalised people

8 Sack et al., "Strengthening Civil Society Participation".

9 Chevallier, "Enhancing Nationally Determined Contributions".

10 These are insights shared at the Zambian national workshop on inclusive NDCs, held on 17 August 2023 and hosted by the ZCCN as part of this project.

11 Sack et al., "Strengthening Civil Society Participation".

who do not have access to the internet. The pandemic also influenced government's productivity and efficiency, affecting communication between it and civil society.¹² While future NDC revision processes are unlikely to face similar restrictions, important lessons can be taken from the 2020 revision process in using the available technologies effectively to promote inclusion. Many CSOs also noted their perception that government views civil society as 'one actor' and so overlooks the differing needs of and challenges faced by different civil society actors. As a result, the needs of marginalised communities, which have low political bargaining power, are often excluded from climate policy. CSOs also noted that the inclusion of women and youth needs to be formally mainstreamed into stakeholder engagement plans. For example, civil society actors in Zambia observed that considerations of gender representation were not applied consistently across the participation and consultation mechanisms.¹³

A lack of understanding of technical content of NDCs and the Paris Agreement

Many CSOs in the project countries noted that the technical language used in the NDCs can be difficult to interpret, which impedes public engagement. While certain civil society actors are well informed and have a history of engagement with climate policy, others may require support to better understand the global and national policy context in which the NDC development process is framed. Simply calling for submissions is not enough – rather, consulting with civil society and educating it on elements such as the Paris Agreement's goals and the outcomes of previous UNFCCC COPs will enhance understanding of NDCs and support participation in climate policy development.

A lack of access to information

While platforms such as the ZCCN and the Mozambique Platform for Climate Change help to relay information about policy engagement opportunities to civil society, many CSOs noted that information about upcoming meetings, deadlines for inputs, etc. is often not effectively communicated by government. Many also noted the short timeframes to submit inputs on the NDCs (which is especially relevant given that some CSO actors may require awareness raising and education on global and national climate policy processes). Other challenges included restrictions on CSOs' ability to engage policymakers and the decision-making processes directly. CSOs argued that a lack of access to the institutional bodies that coordinate climate policy impacted their access to relevant country-level information on the NDC updating process.¹⁴ In addition, civil society often have little or no information on the actions taken in response to their inputs, or may feel that their inputs are not reflected

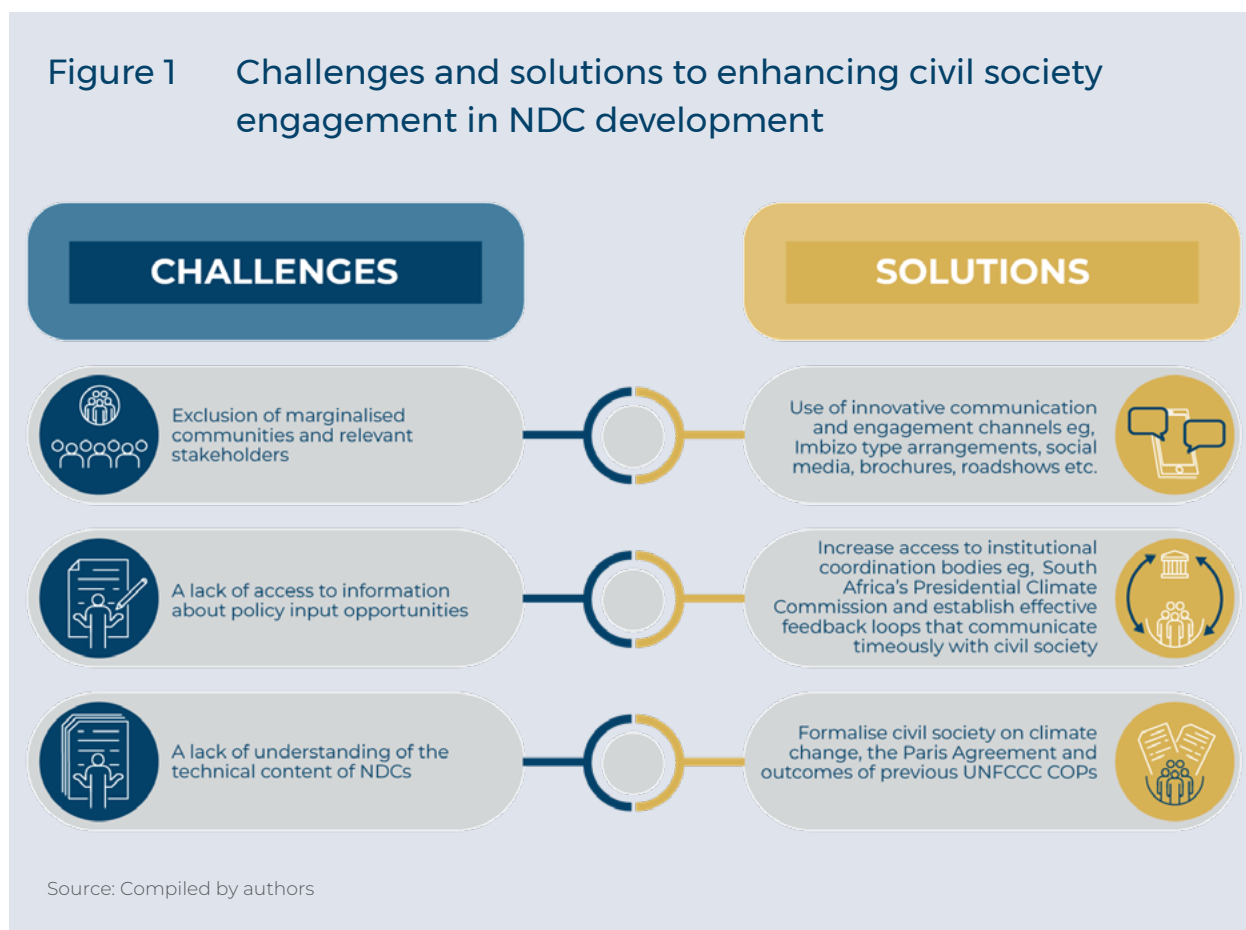
12 Sack et al., "Strengthening Civil Society Participation".

13 Sack et al., "Strengthening Civil Society Participation".

14 SLYCAN Trust and Southern Voices on Adaptation, "Civil Society Engagement".

accurately in policy.¹⁵ It is therefore important to establish effective feedback loops that communicate timeously with civil society when inputs are taken on board or when efforts are being made to implement their requested changes. CSOs also reflected on their own practices and what actions they could take to have greater influence on climate policy processes. While networks such as the ZCCN do assist in fostering collaboration among different civil society actors, CSOs can be guilty of operating in silos, with limited collaboration and information sharing. This undermines the effectiveness of civil society in the NDC process.¹⁶

Figure 1 Challenges and solutions to enhancing civil society engagement in NDC development



Looking forward: Enhancing civil society participation in the upcoming 2025 NDC revision process

Given the challenges experienced by CSOs in South Africa, Zambia and Mozambique during the 2020 NDC revision process, there is ample opportunity to enhance the

¹⁵ Youth Policy Committee, "South Africa's Nationally Determined Contribution", SAIIA, April 30, 2021.

¹⁶ Sack et al., "Strengthening Civil Society Participation".

stakeholder engagement process for the 2025 revisions. Governments are already thinking about ways in which to improve public participation. For example, the DFFE has identified a range of communication channels, recognising that certain channels will be more effective for particular stakeholder groups. Social media is the preferred form of communication for youth, whereas community meetings and imbizo¹⁷ arrangements are more suited to NGOs and rural communities. Such imbizo-type arrangements are essential to ensure that the NDC's proposed climate solutions do not imperil traditional natural resource-based livelihoods and instead safeguard these through the establishment of long-term sustainable pathways.

Ensuring that efficient coordination structures within government are in place and operational prior to the NDC development process will enhance communication both within government and between government and civil society. Zambia has various coordination structures driving the implementation of its climate actions. According to the [National Policy on Climate Change \(2016\)](#), a steering committee acts as the main advisory body to a council of ministers. In addition, a technical committee and the secretariat of the Green Economy and Climate Change Department within the Ministry of Land, Natural Resources and Environmental Protection will support Zambia's climate change response.¹⁸ In South Africa, the [Presidential Climate Commission \(PCC\)](#) was established in 2020. It brings together various stakeholders to inform the development of South Africa's just transition. The PCC is an independent body consisting of the president, 13 ministers and 26 representatives of business, youth, labour, academia, research and civil society groups.¹⁹ It coordinates the inputs of different stakeholder groups, ensuring South Africa's climate policy development is well informed and that feedback from civil society to government is formalised. It can therefore play an important role in supporting the activities of the DFFE, which leads the NDC revision process.

Given that countries in Southern Africa face similar development challenges, especially regarding employment, equality and access to basic services such as water, electricity and transport, there is a need to support peer learning and regional collaboration on inclusive climate policy development. Through workshops and platforms for knowledge exchange, countries can learn from one another and replicate good practices and effective stakeholder engagement strategies. The [NDC Partnership](#), for instance, plays an instrumental role in driving climate ambition through its capacity-building and lesson-sharing activities and its Knowledge Portal, a resource hub on good practice and country experience. This will help accelerate the achievement not only of the Paris Agreement

17 Imbizo is a Zulu word for a traditional gathering of a community. In 2000 the South African Cabinet decided that imbizo as a style of interactive governance and communication should be adopted to promote dialogue between the government and people without mediation.

18 Sack et al., "Strengthening Civil Society Participation".

19 Sack et al., "Strengthening Civil Society Participation".

but also of regional initiatives such as the AU's [Agenda 2063](#), the [AU Climate Change and Resilient Development Strategy and Action Plan \(2022–2032\)](#) and the [SADC Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan \(2020–2030\)](#).²⁰

Conclusion

The Paris Agreement calls on states to support inclusive climate responses. In various ways, governments have made efforts to inform and draw inputs from a range of stakeholders in the process of revising their NDCs. Research and dialogue activities involving civil society stakeholders from Mozambique, South Africa and Zambia have shown, however, that much can be done to improve these processes. Communities and CSOs face numerous challenges in ensuring that their voices are heard in climate policy processes. With the next round of NDC revisions fast approaching, it is an opportune time for countries in the region and beyond to reflect on their NDC review processes, share lessons among each other and promote dialogue and planning to ensure that these policy processes are as inclusive as possible.

20 Sack et al., "Strengthening Civil Society Participation".

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SAIIA's policy briefings are intended for use by policymakers, whether in government or business. They are concise, providing a brief analysis of the issue at hand, and make policy recommendations.

Cover image

Storm over Lake Simonga, Zambia (David Fettes via Getty Images)

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