

Question Nine: Civil Society

How can civil society best support, and hold accountable, national-level governments in their efforts to integrate climate change risks into planning and policy-making processes?

Civil society organizations (CSOs) form an essential bridge between the national-level public officials who are tasked with integrating climate change risks into sectoral and development planning and citizens and local communities that are on the frontline of climate impacts. Depending on their mission, they can deliver essential services and/or play a critical role on behalf of citizens in holding government accountable for lack of action or unwise or ineffective decision making. Their role is particularly important in developing countries where there tends to be a high turnover rate among government officials, limited resources for action, and governance gaps.

At the national level, effective CSOs can accelerate government responsiveness to climate adaptation needs, and act as repositories of knowledge and informal advisers to government. They can also promote good governance in decisions made to address climate adaptation. For example, CSOs can pressure governments to balance decision-making processes that can react quickly to change with the need for engaging, and being accountable to, affected citizens and constituencies.

At the local level, CSOs can build community understanding of, and support for, the development of adaptation initiatives such as information gathering and distribution and early warning systems for extreme events. In some developing countries, where governments are hampered by resource and capacity constraints, CSOs can complement the efforts of national ministries, for example in delivering services, such as disaster relief, to communities.

The World Resources Report has commissioned papers exploring how CSOs can potentially act both as an effective partner and, when necessary, as an effective critic, ensuring that government is taking climate change risks into account. Our question to expert authors is how can civil society best support, and hold accountable, national-level governments in their efforts to integrate climate change risks into ongoing planning and policy-making processes? In their responses, we suggest that authors may like to address the following sub-questions:

- What is the role of civil society in decision making to address long term climate risks, and in engaging citizens in support of such decisions?
- How can CSOs assist governments in reacting quickly to climate change's surprises, including extreme weather events? And how should government officials balance inclusiveness via stakeholder processes and the need to react quickly given the urgency that some climate change impacts might present? Or is this a false choice?
- How can governments provide the conditions for CSOs to be effectively involved in climate change adaptation planning processes?