

Chapter Seven: System Change! Not Climate Change!

As you learn more about climate change, you will likely come to the realization that to avoid climate catastrophe, we need rapid and transformational shifts in policy.

Policies are written or unwritten guidelines created by governments, organizations and institutions, communities, or individuals in response to issues or situations. They are often shaped by logical thinking and by people's assumptions about how things should be, what's good for the community, or what makes life work. From return policies for clothing stores to government policies on climate education, conservation, or fossil fuel subsidies, we are surrounded by policies.

It's important to note that policy differs from rules or law. While the law can compel or prohibit behaviors (e.g. a law requiring the payment of taxes on income), policy merely guides actions toward those that are most likely to achieve the desired outcome.

What is Policy Change?

When a policy is replaced or changed in some way or repealed in parts, then a policy change has occurred. Because policies are often created based on people's assumptions about the world, they're often difficult to change. So, why go through the trouble of changing policies?

- Policies are the basis of society and our communities. If you can change policies, you can more quickly help your community fight and adapt to climate change in the long-run.
- Policy change creates systemic changes that live longer than any program or activity by shifting people's minds and attitudes as well as create permanent changes for the social good.
- Policies all have effects on the next generation.

What is System Change?

Systemic change looks to address the root causes of a societal issue rather than the symptoms. For example, a systemic change would be to stop subsidizing fossil fuels rather than trying to plant enough trees to capture their emissions. System change often results in new, voluntary ways of acting, leading, or doing business. Systems thinking often embraces:

- Embracing the interconnectedness of our world
- Recognizing multiple perspectives and assumptions behind the current state of the system
- Acting on and uncovering the root causes of problems rather than implementing band-aid solutions

System Change, Not Climate Change

Who should try to change policies or systems?

Anyone who is concerned about an issue should feel empowered to change policies. To be successful, all policy change campaigns need to be well informed, well organized, and serve the public interest in a positive way. Though individuals can bring immense power to pushing policy changes forward, it is often easier with groups of people that can bring different levels of technical knowledge, lived experiences, and perspectives. Groups could include coalitions of

individuals, non-profit organizations already working on the issue trying to be changed, and citizen groups created from concerned individuals.

When should you try to change policies?

Though a policy can be changed at any time, there are important windows of opportunity that could make it a little bit easier. Election years, political opinions and outreach on specific issues, new issues, deadlines for providing testimony or end dates of existing policies, emerging crises or events putting your community at risk, or when public opinion reaches a critical mass calling for change are all windows of opportunity.

How can you create system change through policy change?

The Systems Change Framework, outlined below, has been developed to support individuals and enhance collaborations working to shape a new or existing system. You can use these steps to plan how you and your club will lead the change in your community to solve a specific climate issue.

Step 1: Research and Understand the Need for Change. It's important to know as much as you can about the issue and the current policy to ensure the policy change you're seeking is helpful and needed. You should be so well informed that the media, staff of policymakers, and individual groups look to you for perspectives on the policy change. In this step, it's critical to collect information about the target population and identify relevant stakeholders and power structures to understand who your allies and opponents are that can impact your strategy moving forward.

Step 2: Partnerships and Collaborations: After you've researched the issue, it's important to determine who should join your club or group in its effort to make a policy change. Recall from the previous section on the importance of finding people who share your mission and can bring new expertise and support to build momentum for change.

Step 3: Create an Advocacy Plan: Work with your partners to identify possible scenarios of how you could make a policy change. Identify your core priority for change and areas you may be willing to compromise on in the future. Additionally, map out key dates and strategies to ensure that your work remains relevant within the window of change.

Step 4: Build Relationships with Key Stakeholders and Policymakers: Politics is personal. Build relationships with people who influence or make policies, such as policymakers and opinion leaders on both sides of the policy change as well as with the media who can help amplify your work. As a result, you will be more likely to have your emails and phone calls returned, make your voice heard, and maintain credibility for your proposal. In exchange, make sure you follow through with action points you agree to and be friendly even in difficult situations. Don't be afraid to tell people what they want to hear, while holding your ground!

Step 5: Execute Your Strategy and Be Persistent. Follow the roadmap you created in step 2, recognizing that you may need to be flexible along the way. Remember that policy change is hard, so it's important to be persistent and be prepared to keep pushing for as long as it takes.

System Change on Climate Change at the International Level

Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs), like national climate coalitions and civil society organizations play a vital role in providing climate services around the world, with many

societies and communities relying on NGOs for data and knowledge, coordination of climate activities, and stewardship of climate-friendly policies that enable communities to implement sustainable practices. They often play a role in raising awareness of climate change globally, and building the resilience of communities to mitigate climate emissions and adapt to impacts.

At the international level, the primary opportunity for NGOs to make an impact on climate policy is through the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The UNFCCC is a global entity that aims to stabilize greenhouse gas concentrations to a level that will prevent danger to humankind in a timeframe that allows ecosystems to adapt and enables sustainable development. To track progress and identify strategies to work towards these goals, the UNFCCC supports the organization of an annual Conference of the Parties (COP). The COP serves as the main international forum for negotiating climate action, and it brings together representatives from all UNFCCC member countries to discuss and decide on climate policy. For example, the Paris Agreement, which serves as a roadmap and guiding star for tackling and adapting to climate change was agreed to at the 21st Conference of the Parties in 2015.

How does the Paris Agreement influence Action?

A central pillar of the Paris Agreement includes countries' commitments to reducing their emissions aligned with the 2 degree (ideally 1.5 degree) Celsius goal known as Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). They illustrate how a country plans to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to the impacts of climate change as well as what capacity building or financial help they may need to do so. Additionally, they outline specific actions a country may take to achieve its climate targets, such as transitioning to renewable energy, improving energy efficiency, and reducing deforestation. Each country is responsible for determining its own NDC, which is determined by a combination of factors, including its emissions profile, its economic situation, and its capacity to implement climate policies.

Under the Paris Agreement, countries are expected to update and communicate new NDCs every five years, reflecting their latest climate policies and the most recent scientific data on climate change. The first round of NDCs was submitted in 2015, with the next update due in 2025.

It is important to note that the NDCs are voluntary and non-binding. However, they play an important role in driving global climate action by promoting transparency, accountability, and ambition among countries. They also provide a framework for countries to work together on climate action, as they allow countries to learn from each other's experiences and best practices.

How do young people influence NDCs?

Per [Care About Climate's NDC Equity Tracker](#), majority of NDCs do not adequately include young people. However, young people play an important role in shaping climate policies that will more likely affect their future at a greater rate than the decision-makers. To enhance youth inclusion in NDCs, your club or community can:

1. **Review your country's NDCs:** All NDCs can be found on the [UNFCCC NDC Registry](#). This will provide a clear understanding of the country's climate goals and the actions it plans to take to achieve them.
2. **Assess the emissions reduction potential:** The next step is to assess the emissions reduction potential of the NDC. This involves analyzing the policies and measures

outlined in the NDC and estimating the potential emissions reductions that could be achieved by each of them. This can be done using various tools, such as energy and emissions models.

3. **Identify policy gaps and opportunities:** Once the emissions reduction potential has been assessed, it is important to identify any policy gaps or opportunities that could enhance the effectiveness of the NDC. This could involve analyzing the potential impacts of additional policies or measures, or identifying barriers to implementation that may need to be addressed.
4. **Assess the social and economic impacts:** In addition to the environmental impacts, it is important to assess the social and economic impacts of the NDC. This could involve analyzing the costs and benefits of the proposed policies and measures, as well as assessing the potential impacts on employment, energy security, and other social and economic factors.
5. **Design your climate action project around your NDC:** Local-led climate action can provide you with experience and knowledge to inform your country's NDC.
6. **Connect with policymakers:** Though they often do a poor job of reaching vulnerable communities, policymakers should be connecting with NGOs to write NDCs. Instead of waiting for them to contact you, reach out to your NDC policymakers and share your perspective.
7. **Monitor and evaluate progress:** Finally, it is important to monitor and evaluate the progress of the NDC over time. This involves tracking the implementation of the proposed policies and measures, as well as regularly assessing their impacts on emissions, the environment, and society.

Overall, conducting an NDC analysis involves a comprehensive and iterative process of examining a country's climate goals and the policies and measures it has proposed to achieve them. By doing so, analysts can identify opportunities to enhance the effectiveness of the NDC and ensure that it is aligned with the broader goals of the Paris Agreement and global efforts to address climate change.

CONGRATULATIONS! We hope this Toolkit has provided you with knowledge, ideas, and stories to inspire your climate action journey. Remember that we are here to support you in your climate journey through our Community of Practice.