# Solution Toolkit: Actions for local authorities and civil society

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**Energy Transitions Commission**

# Overview

This Solution Toolkit outlines the key actions that need to be taken by **local authorities and civil society** (including key interest groups such as NGOs charities, campaigning organisations and the wider public) to speed up slow planning, permitting and land acquisition processes associated with clean power generation whilst maintaining strong environmental and social standards. For local authorities and civil society there are three principal areas of action:

- Increasing **community awareness**
- Contributing to effective **stakeholder engagement**
- Ensuring effective **processes and resourcing**

As discussed in the accompanying Insights Briefing, there are three major barriers for planning and permitting: regulatory barriers, administrative barriers, and societal support barriers. This Solution Toolkit maps key actions to the barriers that these help to address. Other Toolkits are available for Developers and Governments and policymakers.

Planning and permitting processes and barriers differ vastly depending on the local political and spatial context. For each key action, the Solution Toolkit highlights where actions are of particular relevance to certain types of countries. Four different types of geographies are outlined:

1. **Centrally-led countries**
   e.g., China, Vietnam, UAE

2. **Countries with strong democratic processes**
   e.g., Europe, United States

3. **Highly land-restricted countries**
   e.g., Japan, South Korea

4. **Infrastructure-constrained countries**
   e.g., South Sudan, Burundi, Niger

## Key actions for for wind and solar developers:

Regulatory    Administrative    Societal support

**Community awareness:**

Maximise community-readiness for the energy transition

**Stakeholder engagement:**

Establish and support multi-stakeholder engagement processes

**Processes and resourcing:**

Ensure that local planning processes are comprehensive and that departments are appropriately staffed

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**Barriers to Clean Electrification Series**

The ETC's *Barriers to Clean Electrification* series focuses on identifying the key challenges facing the transition to clean power systems globally and recommending a set of key actions to ensure the clean electricity scale-up is not derailed in the 2020s. This series of reports will develop a view on how to "risk manage" the transition – by anticipating the barriers that are likely to arise and outlining how to overcome them, providing counters to misleading claims, providing explainer content and key facts, and sharing recommendations that help manage risks.

An Insights Briefing will be developed for each barrier, covering the context and major challenges, and assessing the impact of deploying key solutions. These Insight Briefings will be accompanied by a series of Solution Toolkits, which lay out a set of key actions that need to be taken by the most important group of stakeholders (e.g., governments, renewables developers, grid operators, civil society) and outlines supporting case studies.

# Maximise community-readiness for the energy transition

## Key actions

Local authorities and civil society should increase awareness of the benefits to communities from the energy transition, the necessary magnitude of renewables scale up, and potential trade-offs. Clean electrification is the building block of a net-zero economy; its scale up is critical to meet climate objectives. Ensuring public understanding and support is essential given the pace and scale at which new renewable projects will have to come online.

Recent research has shown that low carbon energy and mitigation projects experience community conflict to almost the same degree as fossil fuel projects (this may in part be due to renewable energy plants being proportionately larger than fossil fuel plants).[1] Overall, communities may not support a development if they feel that it does not adequately engage stakeholders, provide benefits, and manage environmental impacts.

**Local authorities should:**

- **Publish** renewable development plans ahead of implementation, which effectively outline the opportunities for the local workforce and local infrastructure impacts.

- **Conduct** education activities (e.g., information campaigns) about the energy transition, types and scale of developments required, and the need for new clean power projects to ensure the sustainability of local communities.

- **Encourage** onsite renewables (e.g., rooftop solar) in new developments in both residential and commercial buildings.

**Civil society should:**

- **Publish** guidance on assessments of the energy transition, including how much wind and solar resources will be required in their relevant regions, and recommendations for how this can be deployed.

### Renewable city action plan in Vancouver

The city of Vancouver effectively communicated the importance of increasing clean electricity generation in its Renewable City Action Plan. The plan contained simple and appealing graphics and visuals, outlined the needs for the transition based on global climate risks, and was published and disseminated widely.[2]

### Guidance for biodiversity conscious offshore wind expansion

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds brought together experts in conservation and wind energy to create the report *Powering Healthy Seas*. The report helps stakeholders to better understand the factors that planners and decision makers need to consider so that UK offshore wind can expand in line with government targets whilst being used as a "catalyst for marine restoration".

This includes recommendations such as: creating a robust ecological evidence base to inform environmentally conscious siting of new offshore wind farms; providing country-level marine plans to give clarity to marine users; and utilising innovative industry standards supported by government policy.[3] Adoption of these principles by the renewables industry should increase buy-in from specific interested parties (e.g., from the fishing industry), and result in fewer legal challenges.

## Implications

Establishing clear strategies to increase community-readiness should create a strong base to begin engagement between local authorities, developers, communities and civil society. Increased local buy-in to the transition should expand the sites available for selection and reduce the scale and magnitude of legal challenges.

## Key country groups

Democratic, land-constrained and infrastructure-constrained countries can particularly benefit from local authorities and civil society increasing awareness of the importance of scaling clean power supply, as public opposition can more signficantly derail projects in these regions.

# Establish and support multi-stakeholder engagement processes

## Key actions

Local authorities should facilitate a process to create bridges and communication channels across communities and other key stakeholder groups to promote active engagement at a local level and build trust. These processes act as a foundation to ensure societal support working towards national objectives. If communities feel that they have an active part in defining renewables as their future, they will likely be more accepting of potential trade-offs.

**Local authorities should:**

- **Establish** collaborative groups including government, business, research organisations and the community to map regional futures and enable investment in the transition. Engagement strategies should seek active involvement of local communities, allowing communities to co-design their future and include the concept of redefining value for the whole community.

- **Implement** transparent multi-stakeholder environmental and social impact management monitoring programs so that communities have better understanding of how environmental impacts will be managed, e.g., to discuss how agrisolar will be used to promote increases of biodiversity around a new solar farm.

**Civil society actors should:**

- **Contribute** positively to the engagement process, representing key constituencies while being cognizant of the broader societal objectives.

### Local authorities support for collaborative engagement in Panama

Local authorities supported developer and community engagement during the planning and construction of the Penonomé project, the first commercial wind farm in Panama, with a capacity of 55 MW. Engagement activities helped improve the communities understanding of the project and its sustainability goals. One tangible result was the introduction of flexible selection criteria for suppliers, which enabled the project to procure from small local contractors instead of larger enterprises, resulting in more income and a direct flow of benefits to local families.[4]

The success of the project led to an expansion, so that as of 2022 the capacity of Penonomé sits at 270 MW.[5]

### Local authorities as a moderator of community engagement in South Africa

Local government played a moderating role for corporate and community engagement on the 32 turbine Kouga wind farm. Local government worked with developers and stakeholders to ensure that equitable benefits were delivered to local communities, including an ownership stake in the wind farm, and the building of new schools, skills development and job creation. The wind farm delivers 300 GWh of electricity each year – enough to power 50,000 South African households.[6]

Local government acted as a "dot-connector" between the community and developers, ensuring that the wind farm designed its strategy in alignment with the policies and plans to support the local community.[7]

## Implications

Strong engagement processes communication and dialogue on the part of local authorities and civil society with the local population will create a solid foundation of support for new projects. This should result in more productive consultations and increased buy-in from communities, leading to an expanded number of sites available for selection and reduction in the scale and magnitude of legal challenges.

## Key country groups

Democratic and land-constrained countries with legal systems that provide avenues for greater opposition would benefit the most from establishment of multi-stakeholder engagement processes. In many infrastructure-constrained countries, multi-stakeholder engagement processes would also help projects get off the ground due to synergies with local economic development goals.

# Ensure that local planning processes are comprehensive and that departments are appropriately staffed

## Key actions

Local authorities must have clear and comprehensive planning processes and an adequate number of staff to process planning applications. Whilst many planning and permitting decisions are made at a national/regional level, local authorities have final decision over most local considerations, which in some instances can be a significant roadblock to wind and solar deployment.

Even in areas where public support for the energy transition is consistently high, some local regulations can be at odds with climate objectives. The needs of the energy transition should be reflected in local planning schemes (i.e. industrial zones, development areas and coordinated infrastructure corridors).

**Local authorities should:**

- **Ensure** that local planning processes do not prohibit renewable energy goals, are clear and comprehensive, and encourage developers to demonstrate how they will consult communities, share benefits and manage impacts associated with developments.

- **Ensure** that local departments are appropriately resourced to support renewable developments, including staffing an adequate number of competent planning officers to assess and review project applications.

## Implications

Sufficiently staffing local permitting departments will significantly reduce time taken for permit applications and examination, especially in areas where local planning authorities have final responsibility for permitting.

This action will be most impactful at reducing permitting duration when paired with creation of permitting one-stop-shops and digitalisation of the permitting process

## Key country groups

Democratic and land-constrained countries would benefit mostly from improved local planning processes and increased numbers of permitting staff, as these groups tend to have the highest administrative barriers.

**Insufficient local planning resources in England**

Under the current planning system in England, all onshore wind projects are decided at local authority level – unlike other large power generation projects (above 50 MW) which are decided by the Planning Inspectorate at national level.

Local authorities are supposed to draw up detailed plans identifying specific areas in which onshore wind projects could be located and any proposal outside those identified areas should be rejected. In practice only 12% of local authorities have identified areas for renewables development, mainly due to a lack of resources.[8]

# References

1   Temper et al (2020), *Movements shaping climate futures: A systematic mapping of protests against fossil fuel and low-carbon energy projects.*

2   City of Vancouver (Accessed 2022), *Climate Emergency Action Plan.*

3   RSPB (2022), *New report shows how the expansion of offshore wind could be a catalyst for marine restoration.*

4   CommDev (2019), *Local Benefit Sharing in Large-Scale Wind and Solar Projects.*

5   Goldwind (Accessed 2022) *Penonomé: Panama's Foray into Wind Energy.*

6   STANLIB (2021), *Kouga Wind Farm generates multiple benefits for investors, community.*

7   Journal of Energy in Southern Africa (2021), *The moderating and mediating role of local government in the community engagement strategy of a renewable energy company in South Africa.*

7   Renewables UK (2022), *Lifting the block on onshore wind is a major step forward towards cheap energy for all.*