

**CLIMATE COMPASS FOR
LOCAL COMMUNITIES: FROM
CHALLENGES TO OPPORTUNITIES**

Climate Compass for Local Communities: From Challenges to Opportunities is a study that examines the challenges of institutionalizing local climate policy in Ukraine. The document analyzes the barriers and opportunities for implementing local environmental agenda and the prospects for cooperation with other actors to address current climate challenges. This paper is based on interviews with local community representatives, topical materials, and a workshop with representatives of various NGOs.

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The authors of this study equally respect women, non-binary people, and men in order to pursue a non-discriminatory approach and declare that the use of gender-neutral terms herein is equal to the use of gender-specific terms.

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PREFACE

The implementation of climate policy in Ukraine faces multiple challenges and difficulties that have only intensified in recent years. First, the COVID-19 pandemic and then the full-scale Russian invasion pushed the environmental agenda to become an immediate priority.

Nevertheless, the environmental dimension of European integration is crucial – Ukraine will approximate its environmental legislation with negotiation Chapter 27: «Environment and Climate Change», which provides for numerous legislative changes towards its way to Ukraine's membership in the European Union. Therefore, the development of climate policy is imperative despite possible public resistance and the seemingly minor issue of environmental protection.

At the national level, processes related to framework agreements, international agreements and the definition of common «rules of the game» have been advanced. At regional and local levels, the focus is on practical steps: not only the execution of instructions received from the management but also the development and implementation of local plans and roadmaps. Local governments are the driving force behind the green recovery of Ukraine. Attracting substantial foreign investments make local governments responsible for the effective utilization of funds and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. They bear a significant responsibility in the context of climate policy implementation, for it's the local actions that will ultimately form the Nationally Determined Contributions (hereinafter referred to as «NDCs»).

The institutionalization of local climate policy constitutes the main subject of the present study. The paper highlights the main difficulties in the

development and implementation of climate policies by local governments and their major challenges and analyzes how non-governmental organizations could enhance the capacity of local communities in this regard.

The study is based on the analysis of topical materials, in-depth interviews with Ukraine's local officials, and a workshop with representatives of relevant Ukrainian NGOs. The questionnaire was designed to gather detailed information on the state of climate policy at the local government level in Ukraine. It includes both the personal views and experiences of the respondents (local officials) and institutional aspects of climate policy implementation.

Main question blocks:

- **Official Duties and Experience:** This block is aimed at finding out the role of the respondents in the city council, their duties, and their experience in dealing with environmental issues.
- **Personal Views and Knowledge:** This block explores the respondents' level of awareness of climate change, their personal environmental practices, and their perception of the importance of climate policy.
- **Institutional Aspects:** This block analyzes the institutional arrangements for implementing climate policy at the local level, the role of different structural units of the city council, as well as challenges and opportunities in this area.

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* Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) are national climate action plans by each country under the Paris Agreement. The countries are required to review and increase the level of targets reflected in their national climate action plans every five years to ensure that the global average temperature does not rise above 2 °C and pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 °C above pre-industrial levels.

** The content of this publication is limited to the experience of the study participants and may not cover all the outstanding issues due to the limited number of respondents.

COORDINATE SYSTEM. LEGAL AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORK FOR COMMUNITY CLIMATE POLICY

The existing climate change legislative framework is fragmented and lacks a coherent system of regulations. The country's fundamental law, the Constitution, contains no mention or provision on climate change and its mitigation or adaptation to it. Sectoral legislation, with a few exceptions, contains isolated references. For a long time, climate policy remained the subject of strategic documents, most of which were adopted by the Resolutions and Orders of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine and with partial rulings from the President of Ukraine. Strategic planning was fragmented and focused on individual elements and thus required systemic improvement.

It's encouraging however that the development of climate legislation is strongly supported by international institutions, including through the provision of technical assistance. It's also worth noting that Ukraine's accession to numerous international conventions (Aarhus, Berne, Minamata) and the Paris Agreement has opened up new opportunities for cooperation with other countries and international support for climate projects.

The year 2016 can be considered a kind of bifurcation point: Ukraine began working on the implementation of the EU Association Agreement. A year later, the [Action Plan for the Implementation of the Concept of State Climate Change Policy Implementation until 2030](#) was approved by a Government Resolution. Subsequently, the [State Strategy for 2021-2027](#) mentioned climate change among the national and global challenges affecting regional development.

After the full-scale invasion, Ukraine's national climate policy has been developed taking into account the principles of green recovery and accession to the European Union. Since then, cooperation with various international institutions and individual countries has strengthened, and technical support projects have been launched to promote climate policy reforms.

In 2023, Ukraine conducted a self-screening analysis to assess the adaptation of its national legislation to the EU acquis, including the climate. Based on the self-screening results, the European Commission noted in its enlargement report the limited progress in reforming Ukraine's climate policy and legislation. The Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine approved the [State Climate Change Strategy until 2035 and the Action Plan for its Implementation in 2024-2026](#) on May 30, 2024, and the [National Energy and Climate Plan](#) was adopted on June 25, 2024.

Also, the European Council adopted the negotiation framework for Ukraine in June, in particular, Chapter 27: «Environment and Climate Change» should be discussed. In practice, this means that more than 900 EU Directives and regulations should be incorporated into our legal system.

«The most important step for the country is to adjust its regulations in accordance with the requirements of the European Union. This would facilitate our work that we are constantly running into legislative gaps in our existing projects.»

Against this background, in October 2024, the Law of Ukraine [on the Basic Principles of the State Climate Policy](#) adopted by the Verkhovna Rada came into force, which aims to define the legal and institutional framework of the state climate policy aimed at ensuring low-carbon development of Ukraine, achieving climate neutrality and adaptation to climate change to fulfill Ukraine's international obligations in the area. Also, the principles for improving the national system of inventorying of anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions and their removal, the operation of a national system for monitoring the implementation of policies and measures, and climate change forecasting. The Law,

among other things, establishes mechanisms and tools for climate action and provides for the development of sectoral reference documents in order to give local governments broad powers in climate policy.

The importance of these processes cannot be overstated. Previously, the system of climate change regulations at the local level could only be expanded through issuing papers by local governments. Since such an initiative was not mandatory, its implementation depended solely on the initiative of local communities.

Today, thanks to the availability of key documents, the framework of climate policy legislation in Ukraine has gained a powerful impetus for development. At the same time, one of the most promising ways to integrate climate policy at the local level is to embed respective measures in existing political and legal documents, namely socio-economic development programs.

Such documents have to be developed. It facilitates project management. When planning an environmental project, the first question we receive from donors is whether we have the respective documents. It supports the community development strategy.

The development of strategic documents at the local level allows for a broader vision and a coordinated effort between different structural units of the local government. When filling in the pre-arranged layout of the respective document with data and activities, the community can discover new aspects of development that were previously overlooked. This helps to take a more holistic view of environmental issues and understanding that challenges of climate change cannot be treated in isolation.

A defined set of strategic documents and plans enables the community's access for grant competitions. If the community does the preparatory work and lays the groundwork for climate policy using these documents, then donor organizations will appreciate these steps and be more likely to support such projects.

At the same time, the development of such documents requires a custom-tailored approach since each community has its own peculiarities.

Not understanding the urgency of the issue, insufficient data, and lack of experience among potential executors make it difficult to find optimal solutions. Therefore, to ensure a successful implementation of climate policy, tasks should be distributed among structural units more efficiently. This would help to avoid ambiguities and ensure a clear understanding of responsibilities.

Climate policy is often viewed as cloud storage: it exists out there and everyone knows that it stores information, but no one fully understands it. The same here: many people do understand the importance of climate neutrality and climate adaptation in the cities. But it is not fully understood how to achieve it and what contribution everyone should make.

This paper examines the regulatory framework for implementing climate policy at the local level exclusively. Two action plans have been selected for this purpose: the Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plan and the Green City Action Plan.

The Sustainable Energy Action Plan (SEAP) or Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plan (SECAP) is a tool offered to communities under the [Covenant of Mayors – Eastern Partnership \(CoM East\)](#), an EU-funded project aimed at bringing together local, regional, and national authorities of the Eastern Partnership countries to develop regional policies based on the principles of sustainable energy, boost energy security, and support the global movement to combat climate change. The document is based on a common goal for EU countries – climate neutrality by 2050, which has been divided into stages to streamline planning for its achievement. Respectively, in the context of the SEAP, the signatories should draw up a set of measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions at a minimum of 35% by 2030 and adapt to the impacts of climate change.

In Ukraine, 357 communities have joined the Covenant of Mayors – East and have either already developed SECAPs or are currently developing them. This project is designed to help the communities address the lack of political will, as the design of the instrument anticipates an active involvement of the community leaders and their teams, which implies approval by the

leadership early on. In turn, this may enhance the implementation of the planned activities.

At the same time, if a change of a community leader took place, or if the current mayor changed his priorities, there is a risk for the commitment of being fulfilled at a minimum level or not fulfilled at all.

If the community develops the SECAP while it is still just a city (it is worth reminding that the development of this document is a time-consuming process that involves collecting data on the current state of the energy sector and climate change mitigation practices of the city, conducting surveys and consulting both with stakeholders in the city council and other parties, such as expert and scientific communities, business, etc.), **it will face the fact that the measures developed are not designed for territories incorporated as part of the decentralization process.** We often talk about suburban areas and adjacent villages/towns, which can be satellites and serve the city (especially when it comes to oblast centers) or be separate self-sufficient units. It's very rare that there's sufficient information collected for such villages or towns to analyze the current situation. A lot of additional effort and time needs to be invested in preparatory work. Even if the preparatory stage is successful with adaptation and mitigation measures completed, there's a lack of local staff to implement them. Therefore, the implementation can be outsourced to the respective agencies in the city, which have numerous additional tasks.

Since non-core departments often have their own higher-priority tasks, they don't always follow the plan. They see it as another document to be handled after their main tasks are completed, instead using it as a guideline.

Although the SECAP contains both a descriptive part and action items, it often **lacks specificity**. Obviously, one document should not list all the minor tasks, but there should be a clear plan with deadlines and assigned staff to handle the necessary details. Otherwise, even a strategically correct plan may fail in its implementation.

On the other hand, there's a risk that **the plan will be developed in a poor way**. Development of an efficient climate action plan requires a systematic approach that involves not only collecting information from different agencies, but also analyzing, structuring, and combining it as a whole. Otherwise, there's a risk of producing

a document that doesn't reflect the real needs of the community and doesn't ensure the achievement of the goals.

Another vulnerability of plans developed by communities before the full-scale invasion or finalized during the first months of the invasion is the **lack of updates conditioned upon the war**. The emergence of new important factors, such as occupation and de-occupation of territories, destruction of urban infrastructures, damaged energy sector from shelling, the mobilization of fighting-age men that worked in local government agencies, a significant population growth from forced internal displacement, etc. will strongly affect the achievement of the previously set goals.

Many of the above challenges, however, are not constant and can be addressed as part of the SECAP implementation monitoring procedure. Community monitoring and reporting procedures should be carried out every two years from the date of signing the plan. As part of this procedure, local governments report on the implementation of their plans and objectives, summarize the results of the measures taken during the last two years referenced to set new measures, as well as modify and adjust previously planned activities while taking into account the factors of community vulnerability to climate change. This process allows for both - expanding the community and including analysis and forecast of the impact of warfare on the community.

Representatives of non-governmental organizations point out that directing the full responsibility for the implementing such plans on a single structural unit would slow down the process of its implementation. The large volume of tasks already imposed on these specialists won't allow them to pay enough attention to another plan. Other units should be involved in the process to accelerate the pace of implementation, by taking on certain tasks or monitoring the progress of the Plan.

The Green City Action Plan (hereinafter referred to as «the GCAP») aims at [helping the city address environmental issues and adapt to climate change](#). It's funded by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (hereinafter referred to as «the EBRD») and implemented by local governments.

The GCAP provides for the following:

- Creating a vision for the city's sustainable development;

- Setting strategic goals to achieve the above vision;
- Development of an action plan;
- Identifying the tools to implement the plan.

The document includes a set of measures aimed at developing and improving bicycle infrastructure, renovating green spaces, modernizing heat supply, water supply and sewerage, etc. In Ukraine, [7 cities have developed the GCAP](#): Lviv, Kyiv, Khmelnytskyi, Dnipro, Kharkiv, Kryvyi Rih, and temporarily occupied Mariupol.

Below, we analyze the difficulties that may hinder the implementation of the GCAP despite the available financial support.

Like the SECAP, it **was developed only for the cities, excluding the needs of the settlements incorporated as part of the decentralization process**. The plan is squarely **focused on urban needs**: the emphasis lies on the development of urban infrastructure, such as public transport, energy performance of buildings and waste management in urban areas. The solutions proposed are often focused on the technology needs of large cities and not relevant for rural or town communities. Meanwhile, rural communities may have other environmental priorities, such as biodiversity conservation, sustainable agriculture, water management, and many still lack a centralized waste collection system, let alone separate collection and composting. Therefore, the lack of attention to the specific needs of rural and town communities, such as the condition of roads, access to clean water and alternative energy sources, effectively deprives the population of the incorporated territories of participation in this Plan.

“We have the Green City Action Plan, which was developed only for the city, but unfortunately does not apply to the municipality as a whole. It doesn't pay much attention to environmental issues either. It's more about transport infrastructure and development planning. It turns out that, in general, we do not have any single competent authority that would efficiently distribute tasks on climate stability promotion.”

Only few SEAP clauses address environmental protection specifically. The Plan focuses rather

on the economic development of the cities, as it's more about infrastructure projects than environmental protection. Not many measures are aimed at ecosystem conservation and restoration, endangered species protection, nature-based solutions, etc. Their Plan's measures also lack detail and clear indicators to assess the effectiveness of the environmental protection measures implemented.

Different communities also differently assess the value of the document for its development needs. Some cities perceive it as a step-by-step guide, a kind of a supplement and an upgraded successor to the Environmental Protection Program, which defines the community's environmental policy for the next 10 years and budgets for its implementation. For others, it's more of a declarative instrument allowing them to finance at least some of their infrastructure projects. As for the financial aspect, this amount of money is too small for the scale of large cities to regard the Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan as a key.

Just like in the case of the SECAP, obstacles for the GCAP implementation come from **inadequate adaptation to the challenges of wartime**. Experts from NGOs mention the fragmentary nature of the document, a diffusion of responsibility for the Plan implementation among a large number of local government agencies, and the lack of staff to implement the planned activities.

Accordingly, even with fundamental plans for implementing climate policy, the community may continue to face a host of challenges impeding the quality implementation of adaptation and mitigation measures. Poor-quality documentation, diffused tasks among agencies without a clear understanding of who the main executor is, activities funded with whatever remaining funds, and delays in the implementation of planned activities create negative dynamics in the progress of such activities. Moreover, demotivate the community to further follow these plans and monitor their implementation.

The situation is exacerbated by ill-coordinated legislation at different levels, which hinders the development of local environmental initiatives. Delays in the adoption of bylaws also complicate the development and implementation of local plans and programs. As a result, local governments are often forced to operate under uncertainty, which negatively affects their performance.

WHO IS IN CHARGE HERE?

CLIMATE GOAL LOCAL MANAGEMENT MODELS

Despite introducing a framework of climate laws, Ukraine lacks a clear definition of political and legal instruments for implementing climate policy at the regional and local levels, as well as mandatory requirements for their forms and legal status.

Local governments are authorized to develop and approve strategies for the development of their territories, including all relevant measures. However, an analysis of existing strategies shows insufficient attention to this issue.

Experts believe that due to the complex nature of climate change, a single centralized mechanism created for managing the challenges may come up short. A combined approach incorporating national planning and sectoral policies would be more appropriate. This approach involves different levels of authority and stakeholders.

The key issue is to coordinate the actions of various actors involved in the development and implementation of climate policy.

Even in the presence of a high motivation level of the political elite and enough personnel to plan and implement the assigned tasks, the most important component of the successful implementation of climate policy is to ensure its sustainability. For this purpose, an appropriate executive level and institutional memory is required.

A core institution created to shape the agenda and bring together relevant experts for the strategic development of the community's climate policy is a well-established practice in the European Union. The so-called «Climate Offices» are a kind of environmental strategy centers that differ in their reporting structure, staffing, and funding, but have one thing in common: climate policy planning and management is concentrated in the hands of a single agency.

Although some local councils in Ukraine (Khmelnyskyi, Vinnytsia) have attempted similar practices by creating a kind of prototype

collegiate body, this practice is not yet widely accepted.

For most parts, the climate agenda in communities can be shaped by the following entities:

- Structural units of local councils (divisions/ directorates/ departments) responsible for meeting the needs and interests of the municipality in the field of environmental and natural resources conservation;
- Core structural units of local councils that are responsible for planning and conducting project activities (utilities, municipal institutions, investment departments, etc.);
- Officials of different levels and subordination (deputy directors of departments, project managers of core utilities, etc.).

In cases where **the community's climate agenda is formed by a single person**, it will always correlate with the position of the executive, the structural unit specifics, and have predominant focal points. This creates a risk of deprioritizing some of the focal points, disorganized networking, and decision-making lacking a comprehensive approach. Another negative aspect is the lack of succession as a mechanism for transferring knowledge and experience. Consequently, in the event of personnel changes, new employees may need more time to learn the material and some important projects may be suspended or even closed.

Therefore, establishing a single agency that would ensure the development of climate policy and monitor its implementation is a desirable scenario for the vast majority of communities. Possible formats for such an entity include:

- Establishing a dedicated structural unit to fulfill obligations under strategic documents already approved by the local government;
- Restructuring an existing structural unit into an agency that creates a strategy and develops and implements relevant policies and programs;
- Restructuring existing units into a cross-sectoral institution.

Such a body should be responsible for shaping the climate agenda, coordinating tasks with other structural units of the local government and appointing executive officers in charge of these tasks.

If there's no people, no project managers assigned to each sector, then this is just a plan that can be laid on the shelf. I'm firmly convinced that local governments should invest in the people – specialists that will run the sectors. Because where there's a person assigned, there's compliance, responsibility, where progress and advancement are observable. If there is no executive assigned, the whole process can be laid off after publishing a post on Facebook.

This thesis confirms the importance of teamwork and inter-agency cooperation. One person, just like one unit, cannot implement high-quality strategic changes at the level of the whole local community.

Climate change is a cross-sectoral issue requiring the involvement of various agencies, ranging from the core ones responsible for urban landscaping to a department promoting public awareness of certain projects and the steps taken by the authorities.

Formats for appointing executives to implement climate policy also vary. It's often not assigned to any specific structure or position in local government. In particular, the fact that regulations on agencies and departments were created long before the climate issue became relevant in Ukraine. In this regard, it's necessary to determine how the policy should be constructed and assign this responsibility to specific entities. This will help to guard against misunderstandings and duplication of functions, as well as strengthen the influence and voice of the designated entity(s).

Since the issue of climate change is quite broad and involves many areas, it's difficult

to determine who is in charge of it. Our regulations on the structural units don't mention a single word about climate change. It's generally about ensuring favorable living conditions for residents within the municipality and promoting public awareness of the state of the environment.

Instead, in some situations, one can observe the issue of fragmentation or duplication of responsibilities on the local government level.

For example, in the solid waste management sector of Lviv, the Department of Environment is in charge of hazardous waste management, the municipal enterprise «Administrator Posluhy z Upravlinnia Pobutovymy Vidkhodamy» («Household Waste Management Service Administrator») is in charge of solid waste collection, tariffs and provision of waste bins, and the municipal enterprise «Zelene Misto» («Green City»), is in charge of the organic waste composting plant, landfill reclamation and construction of a solid waste treatment plant. Another example is in Vinnytsia, where a community of roughly 20 structural units is in charge of landscaping. In such situations, it's difficult for the residents to understand whom to contact for problem solving. This creates an additional burden on the administrative apparatus. In this context, the City Hotline helps address current issues more effectively but to truly solve and not just eliminate a problem's symptoms, a systemic understanding is needed. This should be formed by a limited number of agencies with relevant expertise.

Cooperation between different structural units of local governments can be affected by the following:

- **Hierarchy barriers:** When superior structural units dictate their own terms, limiting the capacities of the structures subordinate to them;
- **Lack of consistent interaction:** When cooperation is based on personal contacts between employees rather than on defined mechanisms of interaction between structural units. This results in unpredictable outcomes and makes it difficult to coordinate efforts;
- **Unclearly divided responsibilities:** The lack of clearly defined cooperation algorithms, duplication of functions, and lack of understanding of the end result by each structural unit result in inefficient use of resources and delayed decision-making processes;

- **Unstable organizational structure:** Frequent reorganizations of structural units make it difficult to build long-term partnerships and spiral into the loss of expertise.

We maintain continuous cooperation with everybody concerned. The departments are also interested in cooperation because this is the impact they can generate with their work.

Cooperation with foreign partners who can motivate local communities to implement ambitious environmental projects and back up this motivation with financial incentives could serve as a catalyst for institutionalizing climate change management in the communities. However, the capacity of the local government to participate in such projects may constitute a challenge.

As per best practices, NGOs, initiative groups, businesses, and other stakeholders can become part of the process. Their active involvement will improve the quality of decisions made and build trust in the decision making process since openness and transparency are fundamental principles of modern democracy.

Cooperation is quite positive, but since there's no clearly defined simple algorithms, they often get complicated. The functions often duplicate and there's a lack of understanding of the end result we want to achieve. Some people believe that climate change is something too global and huge, and they don't understand these small steps that need to be taken gradually to achieve the result of providing favorable conditions for everyone and the environment as a whole.

FROM DECLARATIONS TO REALITY. WHAT HINDERS THE IMPLEMENTATION OF CLIMATE POLICY IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Climate change is a global issue that has distinct local manifestations. Communities around the world, including Ukraine, are already experiencing its impact. Vulnerable social groups are suffering, monthly average temperatures are rising, the number of meteorological disasters increase, biodiversity declines, etc.

Responding to climate change isn't just about choosing an environmentally friendly strategy, but an investment in security and the future.

Given the decentralization processes, local governments as the authorities closest to the people should play a leading role in developing and implementing measures to mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change. However in practice, climate policy faces a host of difficulties at the local level.

This section outlines the difficulties based on the results of in-depth interviews with local officials and a workshop with representatives of relevant Ukrainian NGOs.

Lack of funding. The full-scale Russian invasion has significantly shifted the budgeting priorities of Ukrainian local communities. To meet the priority needs of the population and support the army, funds were redistributed, resulting in the removal of community development budgets or their reduction to minimal levels. Municipalities had to adapt to the «new normal», in which spending on landscaping, water management and waste management passed their ethical limits. This has significantly affected the ability of local governments to implement activities planned in strategic documents and has led to increased competition for grants amongst communities.

The main difficulty is that we don't have sufficient funds to implement climate projects. We also have limited capacity to

attract grants. We learned that donors aren't interested in small communities with a population of less than 50,000.

The implementation of sustainable solutions is often limited due to their high cost and long implementation period.

When talking about environmental protection, many forget to mention that environmental protection is expensive. It's not just about planting a tree.

Yet experiments at the administrative level can save money. For example, in Lviv, after numerous requests from the public to regulate lawn care, an experiment was conducted in 2023 to cut the mowing frequency. Within a few months, the community was able to [save about UAH 6 million](#). In addition, such urban meadows have come to be seen as a tool for climate change adaptation.

While in most cases the initial investment may seem significant, it pays off in the long run through energy efficiency, emissions reduction and other benefits. According to the EU Adaptation Strategy, €1 [invested](#) in adaptation saves €4 or more in the coming decades to combat the effects of climate change, but many aren't aware of this.

In particular, it's difficult to convince local MPs to allocate funds for long-term and expensive green projects. Elected officials tend to give preference to projects offering immediate results that will improve their image and ensure electoral support in the following election.

Community leaders don't prioritize climate and environmental issues. Political will is the

key to the successful implementation of any undertaking. If the community leaders don't realize the importance of putting green issues on the agenda, then environmental initiatives remain at the level of one-off activities. To implement large-scale changes, strategic decisions are needed at the community level, which requires the development and implementation of relevant plans and programs.

One of the biggest difficulties is the various perceptions of this issue at different levels of the executive branch. This leads to differences in priorities, vision, and approach to addressing environmental issues. For example, lower-level employees (heads of core structural units, utilities, and district administrations) are usually more aware of the urgency of these issues. They recognize the impact of climate change on the community and follow trends and developments in the sector. At the same time, community leaders, especially if they lack hands-on experience dealing with environmental topics may not fully realize the scale of the issue and its consequences and focus on «firefighting» rather than planning preventive measures. The realities of martial law also affect their willingness to make decisions in favor of mitigation or adaptation measures.

It's difficult to communicate this. The city leaders don't prioritize climate issues and I understand them because today's priorities are different. There's a war going on and any complaints are out of the question.

Questionable motivation for implementing climate projects. Some local environmental projects are initiated not out of the internal need, but based on external factors such as international obligations or donor requirements. This often results in the perfunctory implementation of such projects without a proper understanding of their importance and necessity. Typically, such projects are implemented for the following reasons:

- Represent the community at international events;
- Assert «primacy» over other communities;
- For the «fear of missing out», when local executives introduce new initiatives cautiously without instructions from management if they see that similar practices

are successfully implemented in other communities.

The central goal of implementing such projects is to gain approval from top management and demonstrate the community's success at the external level rather than to make improvements within the community. Consequently, such activities are often used as a vehicle for polishing the image and reputation of communities.

Climate change impacts are realized only after adverse conditions occur. In communities where the effects of climate change are not perceptible on a daily basis, it's difficult to persuade the authorities into action. Unfortunately, only a fraction of municipalities have assessed their vulnerability to climate change. These are mainly the communities that are signatories to the [Covenant of Mayors](#) (15% of municipalities formed as part of the decentralization process) and whose methodology provides for relevant studies. The lack of understanding of global processes and their impact at the local level often results in community leaders responding to problems only after they arise and without sufficient reserves to effectively address them.

Another aspect of the issue is the **lack of specialists**. It's both about engaging new employees and retaining the existing staff. A significant part of local government employees' working time is spent on addressing current issues, which leaves no time for strategic planning and implementation of long-term projects. In addition, low salaries force many employees to look for better-paid jobs, which lead to high staff turnover and the loss of skilled professionals.

There's a serious shortage of people... even to perform routine tasks, let alone any initiatives. Experienced professionals don't want to work in municipalities and offers of local communities aren't competitive in the labor market.

Universities continue to train staff but there are a number of evident difficulties and gaps that prevent graduates from finding employment in municipalities. The introduction of internship programs would allow students to learn the work of local governments from the inside out, and the authorities would have the opportunity to engage

young people who could quickly integrate into the team and fulfill their tasks.

The lack of professional staff who could write grant proposals for infrastructure projects is most critical in small communities.

We lack experience in this matter and perhaps professionalism. So, it would be perfect if there was a person to take care of such issues. There should be at least one official to handle such issues exclusively. This person could be part of the energy management department.

In recent years, this gap has been filled mainly by NGOs and international donors, through the organization of training in project management and proposal writing. However, it should be understood that even a person who has completed such training won't necessarily be able to put the skills they have acquired into practice.

Lack of support from the population. In wartime, any local government's expenditures not addressing the security issue are questioned by the population and perceived in a negative light. This can be explained by the lack of public awareness of the budgeting processes, the responsibilities of different government branches and the peculiarities of executive offices depending on their level. Corruption scandals, which are emphasized in the media, increase social tensions. Active citizens are fighting against «irrelevant» and «ineffective» spending, and it's the responsibility of the bureaucracy to explain the importance of each such instance of procurement. A sharp reaction to a community request may fuel distrust and confrontation, which could be avoided through detailed explanations and public awareness campaigns.

This applies to both the issue of budgeting and the climate policy itself.

There's funds from the environmental protection programme that could be spent on conservation efforts but the city community isn't ready to accept such expenditures yet. Despite the fact that these funds can be spent on environmental

protection measures exclusively, people aren't quite ready to accept that funds can be allocated for tree planting even in wartime.

I don't see a real demand from the townspeople. There are activists, it's true, but their voice is too weak.

Instead of talking openly about the environmental and climate aspects of the issues, they are often disguised as social and economic ones, thus simplifying perception and offering people a substitution of concepts. At the same time, the concealment of environmental problems hinders the development of environmental awareness and prevents the establishment of a responsible attitude towards the environment.

Actually, we work with climate issues by hiding them in other issues, because now such matters just make people laugh... We say that it's for the protection from flooding, it's for health protection, it's to support the environment – because people are mindful of this. We feel the need to appeal to core values, and saving the planet and combating climate change isn't that basic.

If funds are allocated for the thermal modernization of a building or the purchase of more energy-efficient equipment, there's an understanding that saving resources means saving funds that can then be allocated to support for the army, internally displaced persons, and so on... This is a material component and people understand this.

On the other hand, the study [«Climate change and citizens of Ukraine: peculiarities of public opinion and communication»](#) by the Society and Environment Resource and Analysis Center shows that almost 2/3 of Ukrainians feel a personal responsibility for combating climate change (61.1%), a quarter of them fully agree that combating climate change is their personal

responsibility (27.4%). Almost every Ukrainian feels the impact of climate change on their area: 24.2% feel a strong impact and 64.8% feel a moderate impact (89% in total). Three-fourths of residents expect significant climate change impacts in the future for the region where they live.

These statements were also reflected in the responses from local authority representatives.

When we were conducting the survey, it was clear that people were concerned about the issue. Many responded that they were ready to separate waste and clean up the areas. And indeed, many say that the number of hot days has increased, that is, it has become hotter...

As for local statistics, we can refer to the [Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plan of the Lviv Community](#). It mentions that the overwhelming majority of Lviv residents note that abnormal heat has a negative impact on their health and well-being. In particular, 76.1% of respondents indicate that they are uncomfortable staying in the city during heatwaves and 69.2% say that there are not enough green areas and public spaces in their communities.

Failure to implement climate policy due to Russian occupation. Part of the territory of Ukraine is currently temporarily occupied by Russia, which makes it impossible not only to implement any changes but also greatly complicates the development of realistic plans for reconstruction after the de-occupation of the territories. Due to the lack of data on the situation in the temporarily occupied territories, the lack of expertise to create such a type of document, and the lack of practical experience in implementing green recovery projects in Ukraine, the expert community and the authorities are facing an enormous number of challenges. Therefore, planning, piloting, and testing new schemes, plans, and approaches to implementing climate policy as part of fair and green recovery in the damaged and de-occupied territories should be carried out in relatively safe communities and with a flexible approach to addressing challenges and issues.

We would like to elaborate on the **range of issues related to data processing and monitoring that**

are shared by most communities in Ukraine. Due to the inconsistent nature of collecting and analyzing data, municipalities often face a lack of information to conduct climate modeling when planning for change. Even when information is collected, it's often either incomplete or not unified in terms of metrics. Complicating or preventing access to data compromises the quality of climate policy.

Again, it's the data that is currently lacking. If we collect data on many parameters, monitoring will be absolutely feasible.

The data obtained from monitoring and assessment can serve as a valuable source of information for making informed decisions on the further development of climate policy. This data can be used to demonstrate achievements and attract additional resources but analysts don't always pay enough attention to them.

Successful implementation of long-term climate strategies requires detailed short-term plans that are reviewed regularly. This allows the strategy to adapt to changing conditions, ensures transparency of the process and promotes public involvement. Lack of monitoring experience in communities can delay the implementation of strategies and lead to inefficient use of resources.

Instead, a well-planned monitoring system can serve as a useful instrument for work. It helps not only to map out the strategy in a better and more structured way but also to effectively assess the steps implemented, keeping the more effective ones and eliminating those that don't facilitate the achievement of the goal.

Several obstacles to effective monitoring and assessment of climate policy implementation can be distinguished.

Indicators are not established at the beginning of the project or plan implementation. When analyzing the strategic documents of communities, it can be noted that the authors often allocate a long period of time for even minor goals, and a large number of such minor goals are implemented concurrently, which leads to the implementation of single-point interventions within a fairly short time instead of gradual sustainable changes. The community can present this result as an achievement and

successful execution of the plan, although in reality, the approach is problematic in terms of the initial creation of set monitoring criteria.

Overstated rates. Trying to copy the success of larger and better-resourced communities may result in setting unrealistic goals. This may demotivate the executives, lead to inefficient use of resources, and interfere with the achievement of long-term goals. To avoid this, it's important to align plans with realistic possibilities.

Downplayed indicators. Voluntarily or involuntarily, indicators can also be downplayed. This may result in the community catching up during the last stage of plan implementation, or in submitting false monitoring indicators for the successful completion of the program cycle. Such a tactic may be justified if the community isn't confident in its abilities and wants to test its resources and tools during the first stage of program implementation. Especially if implementing a plan for the first time and to use the information obtained in further stages to plan more effectively and raise the ambition of its actions. In this case, it is necessary to state this in the document so that in the future, understated indicators are not perceived as a starting point.

Progress is not monitored at all or the implementation of plans is suspended. The full-scale war forced communities to revise their plans. Some have officially amended them, others have postponed the revision, and still others don't plan to change anything at all in hopes for special conditions. Such differences in approach are due to numerous factors, including the availability of resources, priorities, and public expectations. It's important to realize that while current issues require immediate solutions, strategic planning is necessary for long-term development.

A more flexible monitoring system should be put in place. The reality has taken quite a different turn: the time when we could plan projects for several years ahead is over, now everything changes every 3 months. So we have to be highly flexible in our processes. Monitoring should also be conducted more frequently to allow us to revise goals because the world is fast-moving and time flies by.

Only quantitative indicators are taken into account. Traditional monitoring focuses on quantitative indicators because they are easy to measure and use in reporting. However, this approach does not allow for a comprehensive assessment of the content of changes and their impact on the community. The introduction of qualitative indicators would provide a fuller picture of the results and more effective communication with all stakeholders. In the long run, this would help officials convince the management, elected officials, and residents of the need to implement climate policy. With ready-made answers to their questions, there will be no need to spend additional time collecting and analyzing data that has already been collected as part of the monitoring.

“Making reports and constant analysis is what monitoring is all about, showing whether you are moving in the right direction. If you score more points, you are moving in the right direction. If you score less, then you need to go back to the baseline and rethink the concept.”

“I have to admit that our council does lack people that could be engaged in monitoring because, in addition to the policies themselves, there also are appeals from citizens... So the staff number needs to be increased. In addition, these should be people of a different format, they should have a deep understanding of this issue.”

The implementation of climate policy at the local level faces a number of difficulties. Insufficient funding, a lack of skilled personnel and political will, and the impact of hostilities limit the ability of communities to implement environmental initiatives. Low public awareness and difficulties in monitoring and assessing project effectiveness further complicate the situation. To overcome these challenges, joint efforts at all levels of government and public engagement are required.

THE POWER OF JOINT ACTION. HOW PUBLIC ASSOCIATIONS AND NGOS CAN CONTRIBUTE TO LOCAL CLIMATE POLICY

The conditions of martial law under which communities are currently operating are not the most favorable for building capacity to address climate challenges. At the same time, they open up a number of opportunities for institutionalizing local climate policy.

This can be achieved by building a dialogue with civil society organizations. Thus, the third sector has the potential to strengthen municipalities in the following:

- Growing topical expertise;
- Search for grant opportunities;
- Intensifying sustainable and ethical partnerships;
- Implementing pilot projects;
- Participation in climate change education.

Cooperation between local authorities and such organizations can be both one-off or strategic. It's usually planned based on the needs and experience of the parties.

The lack of experience in effective cooperation with civil society organizations or the presence of negative experience in the structural units of local governments prevent the effective use of the opportunities mentioned above.

Any cooperation begins with initiative. When implementing strategic documents, local officials should stimulate initiative and readiness to be the first to start a dialogue. However, according to the interviewed representatives from non-governmental organizations, it's equally important to rely on officials to respond to initiatives coming from NGOs themselves. In practice, this means that the staffing lists of executive bodies should include positions for employees who can «take care» of the dialogue with the public and assume responsibility for the implementation of joint projects. The lack of relevant personnel means that the community may support cooperation declaratively, but in practice, the responsibility for implementing

the idea will still fall on the shoulders of the NGO and destroy the idea of an equal strategic partnership.

Non-governmental organizations can be helpful in both planning and implementing the community's environmental agenda, as well as monitoring the planned activities and assessing their effectiveness. Given the experience of many Western countries, it would be worthwhile for Ukrainian municipalities to delegate to civil society the implementation of targeted programs through the tool of social procurement by signing contracts on a competitive basis.

As for strengthening the climate policy of municipalities **through the expansion of topical expertise**, the format of cooperation may vary. Requests for free consultations through submitting proposals to program documents, participation in advisory bodies, participation in planning municipal sustainable development strategies, and the provision of specific paid consulting services, where representatives of NGOs can provide professional advice in topical areas, are widely practiced.

From the perspective of **seeking grant funding, the following should be kept in mind**. There are funds and programs whose primary beneficiaries are communities, therefore there isn't a need to involve additional actors in the process. However, a number of program primary beneficiaries can be exclusively a non-governmental organization. In particular, such projects may be aimed at collecting data. As stated above, it's challenging for a number of local governments already.

Municipalities can cooperate with NGOs to secure funding for the collection of the necessary data and implementing projects based on its processing. For example, environmental organizations can assist local governments in proposal drafting and writing calls for proposals announced by international or national donor

organizations on the implementation of environmental initiatives. It should be noted that joint project implementation is a preferred marker for many donors and maintains better transparency, accountability, and efficiency in fulfilling the commitments declared at the application stage.

Cooperation with NGOs is a good chance to raise funds for areas that require additional funding or are not funded at all. This is important given that some structural units of local governments have no opportunity to acquire extra-budgetary funds and those who have such an opportunity, are aware that transfer management through treasury accounts is complicated and burdensome for many donor organizations.

One of the distinctive features of the public sector is the desire to create an extensive network of partners at the local, national, and international levels. Therefore, another advantage of working on the NGO-municipality axis is the chance of **intensifying sustainable and ethical partnerships**. Non-governmental organizations can serve as a channel to introduce municipal officials to new potential partners, act as intermediaries in establishing contact, provide recommendations and facilitate the signing of cooperation agreements, etc. Networking with local environmental action groups, universities, and research institutes to collaborate on environmental projects is also a good opportunity.

Another format could be networking meetings, conferences, and workshops to connect and foster cooperation between potential partners – a rather novel and unusual format for local governments, but a well-established practice for NGOs, where the key outcome of the event is establishing contacts rather than defining cooperation arrangements.

In addition, NGOs that protect their reputation and cherish green values can deter communities from cooperating with companies that pollute the environment and are prone to greenwashing.

Another aspect is the role of NGOs in the **implementation of pilot green projects at the community level**. Active engagement of third-sector representatives not only reduces the risks of failure but also ensures more efficient and reasonable use of public funds in the future.

Non-governmental organizations have the capacity to pilot individual solutions,

collect feedback and advocate for new local policies. However for NGOs, a failed project implementation would result in strategy adjustment and a search for a new approach. For local governments, it would result in significant reputational damage and accusations of inefficient use of taxpayers' money.

Hence, NGOs are in a better position to experiment with new environmental solutions and technologies through pilot projects, particularly in the areas of waste management, energy efficiency, and biodiversity conservation. This allows them to evaluate the effectiveness of their solutions and prepare for large-scale implementation.

Partnerships between NGOs and local governments **in the field of participatory climate education** should become an effective tool for increasing community awareness of the effects of climate change and other environmental challenges. Joint efforts will make it possible to develop and implement comprehensive programs that not only raise awareness about climate change but also promote social engagement and the implementation of environmental initiatives at the micro-community level.

An example of such cooperation is the establishment of physical demonstration spaces that aim to showcase environmental initiatives, innovations, and technologies that can be implemented in everyday life. Such spaces serve as educational centers for the local community by offering the opportunity to learn about the benefits of sustainable development, energy efficiency, and environmental protection, as they can visualize these technologies and make them more accessible to the public. A good example in Ukraine is the [Gufi Center](#) in Khmelnytskyi, founded by the City Council. Another example is the [community gardening and horticulture space «Rozsadnyk»](#) in Lviv, which was founded by the non-governmental organizations «Plato» and «Ecoterra» in partnership with the Lviv City Council. Such centers can not only conduct tours and training, but also involve the local community in the creation of advisory councils for decision-making on development and functioning of the space, and discuss achievements, challenges, and plans for the future.

The media can also serve as an effective tool for dialogue between environmental organizations, local governments, and the public. Being independent entities, some NGOs can express their position and initiate discussions

on environmental issues. Joint information campaigns, leveraging social media and other communication tools make it possible to convey the importance of environmental issues to a wide audience and engage them in response.

The introduction of a reward system for local governments can also be instrumental in driving environmental change in the community. For example, recognizing the achievements of municipalities increases their responsibility to the residents and encourages officials to search for new solutions. This approach, which is already widespread in the business sector, can

be a powerful tool for promoting environmental awareness and practices in Ukraine.

These ways of supporting the activities of local governments stress the importance of cooperation between environmental NGOs and local authorities, as well as the role of the third sector in improving the effectiveness of environmental measures and ensuring sustainable community development. Cooperation and participation are integral elements of a democratic society, where local governments facilitate citizen engagement in decision-making and co-creation of a greener future.

CONCLUSIONS

Climate policy is a key element in ensuring Ukraine's progress. The regulation of the climate governance architecture in national legislation is relevant not only because of the country's reputation in the international arena but primarily because of the need to ensure the country's sustainable development and the well-being of its citizens.

Climate change demands that we reduce the consumption of fossil fuels, use resources efficiently, conserve energy, and reuse things, as reflected in the EU policies and international agreements. Ukraine, while implementing the climate agenda, is also waging a defensive war against the Russian Federation, which rightfully shifts the focus to military needs. Nevertheless, climate policy is essential for Ukraine's economic development, public health, and environmental sustainability, and should be integrated at the local level, despite current challenges such as lack of funding, political will, and local specialists.

Despite the challenges identified, the prospects for implementing climate policy remain encouraging, as every problem has the potential for new solutions. Despite the relative novelty of the topic and the rather limited time to implement qualitative changes, Ukrainian local communities have a unique opportunity to develop the models and approach that will help them effectively address the challenges posed by climate change.

Since the beginning of our European integration course, the national legal framework has undergone significant changes, including the adoption of the National Energy and Climate Plan and the Law of Ukraine on the Basic Principles of the State Climate Policy. However, a number of challenges need to be addressed for the successful implementation of climate policy, including a lack of understanding of climate neutrality among the executives, inconsistent legislative changes, and a lack of specialists to develop documents. It's also important to ensure that the entire apparatus is informed and that tasks are clearly assigned to structural units, as well as enhance expertise and respond to the specific needs of newly established communities.

Even in the presence of a high motivation level among the political elite and enough personnel to plan and implement the assigned tasks, the most important component of the successful

implementation of climate policy is to ensure its sustainability. A dedicated agency should be created and institutional memory should be formed, which is a well-established practice in the European Union, where core institutions set the agenda and bring together experts for the strategic development of the community.

In Ukraine, this approach is not yet adopted. Shaping the climate agenda often relies on the officials at different levels, which may lead to biased interpretation of climate issues, prioritization of political interests over environmental ones, and the lack of a shared vision and coordinated action at all levels.


To ensure effective implementation of climate policy, it's worth considering the model of establishing a dedicated body or restructuring existing units to better coordinate common efforts. Such a body should not only shape the policy but also monitor its implementation, engaging various structural units and stakeholders. Consistent cooperation between structural units of local governments, international donors, and local stakeholders is key to achieving sustainable development and improving the quality of life in the community.

The stage of monitoring and assessment of the program outputs, especially for climate programs, is often underestimated by communities, although it's key to strategic planning and gradual change. Properly arranged monitoring allows for effective assessment and adjustment of the steps implemented, which promotes the achievement of ambitious goals, such as carbon neutrality by 2050. The main difficulties include inadequate indicators, focus on quantitative data instead of qualitative ones, and termination of monitoring due to force majeure, including war. Local communities should use monitoring as a tool for development and not as a source of fear or penalty, and adapt it to their real capacities and needs.

To address environmental issues and fill existing gaps, local governments need to attract various resources and build partnerships, including with non-governmental organizations. Cooperation with the third sector can be both one-off or strategic and include expert engagement, access to grant funding, assistance in finding new partners, piloting projects, raising awareness

on climate change, and conducting awareness campaigns. Physical demonstration spaces and awards for environmental achievements can also be instrumental in enhancing the effectiveness

of environmental measures. Such cooperation emphasizes the importance of joining efforts to achieve sustainable community development and build a democratic society in Ukraine.



When we talk about issues such as climate change, we mean 30 or even 50 years. It's difficult for us to comprehend all this from our event horizon but we have to move away from «firefighting». We need to work strategically towards a long-term result because the issues that we face as a result of climate change won't become relevant right away. However, if we do not prepare for them now, they become inevitable.

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