

How To Maintain “Healthy Planet” As A Cross-Cutting Value In CSOs' Work



From malnutrition and poverty caused by droughts, to forced migration due to environmental factors like flooding, the effects of climate change are hugely impacting the everyday lives of citizens around the world - becoming one of the most pressing threats facing humanity.

As civil society organisations work to support and lift the voices of communities, it is no longer possible to ignore that climate change is becoming a root cause of many of the issues that CSOs wish to support and collaborate to resolve. To truly make lasting positive change, CSOs also need to take the next steps to further address and embed environmental protection within their work.

On this **World Environment Day**, Accountable Now alongside MIO-ECSDE present a cheatsheet on how CSOs can maintain “Healthy Planet” as a cross-cutting value in their work - looking at how organisations, especially those whose focus may not be on environmental issues, can begin to embed climate-friendly actions at different levels. Read on for a range of simple to more complex solutions for you to consider starting depending on your context and organisational will!

Start small. Start from within.

You can begin by reviewing your organisation's internal policies and understand where it could be useful to start adding new and more environmentally-friendly practices. There are many ways to begin minimising footprint as a whole, and small steps can add up. Refer to [MIO-ECSDE's Environmental Policy](#) to be inspired and see how it can be done.

It is not difficult for CSOs to develop a **carbon footprint calculator** for specific areas (e.g staff travel) to collect data from travel frequency, carbon emissions from air tickets, staff daily transportation, etc., to draw out a baseline for future evaluation. From here, CSOs can make a pledge to reduce that source of emission for a year (and potentially expenditures as well!), perhaps starting from reducing business travel. If you hit your goal(s), make sure to celebrate your achievements with all your colleagues!

Some other ways that CSOs can reduce operational carbon footprint includes ordering supplies in bulk to minimise packaging, buying second hand office furniture, minimising single use plastics (SUPs), switching off devices when not in use, using environmentally-friendly printing ink and paper, setting up an office compost, recycling, giving renewable energy a go, and banking with a green institution. Of course, please do consider the cost of switching and make sure you are not wasting more resources when going for more green options. Lastly, the availability of these options may vary depending on the location - so do what is possible and best for you!

Involve your colleagues.

Make sure everyone in your team is equally informed and instructed to follow the environmental policies from the very beginning. **Educate your team on climate jargon** (e.g. net zero, decarbonisation, greenhouse gas emissions, carbon footprint) in a meaningful way through activities or easy to digest methods. This could be done by organising team-building activities that address climate change in some way (tree planting, gardening activity, clean-ups, etc.).

Talking to your workforce about the environment and inviting them to offer their own suggestions on how your organisation can help combat climate change will encourage your colleagues to get on board with climate efforts. **Co-creation will enable your colleagues to take ownership of the goals that you've set together**, helping them to feel a sense of pride and purpose in reducing climate impacts.

Another idea to enhance your organisation's responsibility is by making a **climate change pledge**. This will also facilitate building your own action plan. Examples of pledges include:

- [The Climate Pledge](#)
- [The Climate Neutral Pledge \(UNFCCC\)](#)

Both of the above pledges support organisations to show public commitment, estimate their emissions, act to reduce them, contribute (through offsetting), and report annually.

Consider your procurement process & supply chain.

Well-handled resources also mean minimising the environmental impacts of CSOs' work. **Supply chains can be complicated, opaque and have massive carbon footprints; a product can travel through 4-5 countries before it reaches its final users.** Be mindful of this and source as responsibly and locally as possible.

Going beyond only climate impacts, **sustainability also involves fair practices that consider justice and equality.** Ask your suppliers to adopt more sustainable practices (such as giving proof of not employing children, paying fair wages, etc.) or proof of their relevant certifications. You can make a difference by changing to more sustainable suppliers if the old ones refuse to change.

Engage communities to understand climate impacts of programmes.

Communities are experts in their environment and context; they understand the real causes as well as having traditional knowledge of mitigation strategies for their surroundings. In collaborating with communities, organisations should ensure that they are engaged and consulted, make efforts to understand communities' points of view and make decisions together in a horizontal way. **In doing so, CSOs would be able to make programmes more adaptive to communities' needs, amplify and promote communities' solutions for better outcomes.**

To begin, CSOs can run environmental workshops/climate dialogues to discuss with communities, share experiences and invite them to do the same. The same can be replicated with CSOs' partners: **consult partners about how climate change affects their work or their employees'/members' health.** Invite local environmental NGOs, local experts or innovators to share more about their work in their local contexts. There is a lot of false news and information regarding the environment and climate change - localised knowledge and expert input can help address this.

Understand the drivers of needs to address root causes.

Many of the arising issues that INGOs and CSOs work to overcome could potentially stem from climate change or environmental impacts. Some examples are: food shortages, health, migration, gender inequity, lower quality of life for disadvantaged communities, un(der)employment among youth, among others. As CSOs have platforms available, they need to raise awareness and amplify voices so that everyone, especially those who hold power, can recognise the main drivers and address root causes.

Some actions that organisations can start with include **consultations with communities to understand underlying causes to their needs,** and organising in-house events, hackathons or campaigns to raise and improve awareness on the links between climate change and arising issues of your organisation.

Consider the environment as a silent stakeholder.

Dynamic accountability is about establishing trusting relationships with stakeholders, meaningfully engaging them to be able to build programmes collectively and course correcting together. **While the environment may not have a voice, in considering the environment as a silent stakeholder, organisations can implicitly recognise the impact of their work on the environment, and see this as an opportunity to make those impacts positive.**

A possible step towards this is to appoint a green team or climate ambassadors who can act as advocates for the environment as a silent stakeholder in decision making processes.

Think bigger – promote innovation!

By supporting and disseminating major green initiatives or innovative ideas such as projects on sustainable food production and consumption, smart energy, zero pollution, among others, CSOs can help in large and wide scale behavioural change. However, **not all innovations are good - greenwashing and unsubstantiated claims are tactics employed by some businesses to sell more products.** Be careful to get expert advice before embarking!

