

The Asian Co-benefits Partnership (ACP) serves as an informal and interactive platform to improve information sharing and stakeholder coordination on co-benefits in Asia. The ACP was launched with the support of the Ministry of the Environment, Japan in 2010 to help mainstream climate and environmental co-benefits into decision-making processes in Asia. Learn more about us at our website. <http://www.cobenefit.org/>



Highlights



Social Co-benefits for Just Sustainability

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A new book *Aligning Climate Change and Sustainable Development Policies in Asia* was published this summer by Springer to share knowledge on how to quantify, integrate, and advance co-benefits. The book also presents new perspectives on co-benefits such as from linking climate change mitigation with social issues. This issue of ACP newsletter shares a summary of the social co-benefits chapter from its author, Dr. So-Young Lee.

Why is it important to consider the social dimensions of co-benefits for policymakers?

One of the main reasons why the co-benefits community needs to focus more on social dimensions is the growing occurrence of environmental-related extreme events. These events have changed the way that policymakers understand risk and vulnerability. For example, heatwaves are becoming more frequent and intense with climate change; and, these extreme events, unfortunately, tend to register the deepest impacts in economically poor countries and communities where there is a larger dependence on local natural resources. A failure to recognise the social dimensions of climate change will ultimately leave them further behind.

The good news is that there is a growing recognition of the social dimensions of co-benefits at the international level. Since the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development and Paris Agreement in 2015, policymakers have placed more emphasis on the interrelationship between climate change mitigation and the livelihoods of the underprivileged. There is even some efforts to recognise these dimensions in many fora at the ongoing discussions at COP 26. The achievement of co-benefits with linkages to these social aspects is hence both timely and an increasingly urgent.

This leads to an important question: what are social co-benefits? Social co-benefits range from green jobs to greater socioeconomic and gender equity (often from the active inclusion of these stakeholder groups in decision making process). This raises another point meriting attention. Much of the literature on co-benefits has focused on quantifying environmental and health

impacts. The implementation of social co-benefits initiatives suggests that quantitative analysis need to be complemented with actual on-the-ground projects and policies engage with beneficiaries to deliver co-benefits. Lessons learned from working with beneficiaries in existing cases is a critical piece of the co-benefit puzzle.

Can you elaborate the good practices involving social co-benefits in Asia?

Several of the co-benefits can be found in the transport sector. The transport sector in Asia has faced myriad challenges, ranging from congestion to increasing GHG emissions. Like many cities in Asia, Manila, the Philippines has not only confronted these challenges but taken steps to overcome them. For instance, to reduce the quantity of vehicles, the National Climate Change Action Plan for 2011-2028 supports an integrated transport master plan that covers non-motorised transport. This also includes an important area for social co-benefits: bicycle sharing.

Co-benefits from bicycle sharing systems extend beyond emission reductions; some of the more important benefits are social in nature. The bicycle sharing system provides low-income individuals in Manila metropolitan area more access and connectivity to public transportation that many people rely on to get to places or work and business as they may lack their own vehicles. Bicycle sharing is therefore essential to a sustainable income.

Unlike Manila, the city of Toyama, Japan has faced a slightly different set of social issues with links to co-benefits. Many of these issues relate to the decreasing

population and aging society. In the early 2000s, these changes in demographics resulted in the city centre losing people and business. In 2002, Toyama would set up a Compact City Development Plan to help revitalise the city. A core feature of that plan was Light Rail Transit (LRT) that would help deliver a wide range of benefits, especially for the elderly from compact city planning. This was done through careful planning that took into account the distinct needs of an older ridership – the LRT included low carriage floors as well as wheelchair accessibility to the stations. The improved public transport system created social co-benefits for older people—a reliable ridership group—and also gave new life to activities in the city centre while also reducing CO₂.

A third case that illustrates social co-benefits involves gender and climate change in Viet Nam. In Dong Hoi, a project was conducted to demonstrate women could have potential to become change agents to contribute to sustainable development and climate mitigation. The project in question focused on engaging women in the biogas supply chain and equipping them with the technical, construction, business and marketing skills needed for bio-digester supply business. As a result, women participants increased their understanding of opportunities and become actively involved in promoting social co-benefits between social issues of gender equality, poverty reduction and climate change mitigation.

A similar set of social co-benefits was delivered through the implementation of the advanced cook-stove project in Lao PDR. That intervention was unique in that it sought to empower a segment of the population that is

frequently left out of the employment market: namely, disabled women.

What are the challenges to delivering social co-benefits?

One of the main limitations is the sustainability and long lasting impacts of the aforementioned social co-benefits projects and programmes. As most of the initiatives are funded by specific project fund or *ad hoc* governmental financial support, it could be asked whether these efforts might continue after that support ends. To be truly transformational, a critical step is promoting the investment from local governments and communities in their own social co-benefits initiatives rather than rely on the grant-financed projects or programmes.

While domestic funding is critical, an important lesson from many of the cases we have worked on is that the participatory and inclusive stakeholder engagement in decision making and implementation on more integrated solutions to climate and sustainable development can also help deliver long lasting results. This is because engagement and inclusion can increase ownership and strengthen incentives for actions. It is also worth noting that the ultimate goal of social co-benefits is to provide benefits to a wide range of communities, local actors and society rather than specific sectors or stakeholders. Achieving social co-benefits therefore needs to be multidimensional and multidisciplinary. At the same time, solutions also should vary across different places with a keen eye toward not only the benefits but the beneficiaries.

Updates

ACP Good Practice Map collected 43 cases from 12 countries in Asia: The ACP Good Practice Map was created in 2016 to share illustration of the vast and varied approaches taken to achieve co-benefits in key sectors i.e. Energy/Industry, Transportation, Waste Management and Biomass/Fuel in Asia; and, Livelihood was added to capture the importance of social co-benefits as well as Tools to highlight the importance of quantification of co-benefits. As of summer 2021, total of 43 cases have been collected from 12 different countries in Asia. Find out each case more in detail at: https://www.cobenefit.org/good_practice/



Third Asia Pacific Clean Air Partnership (APCAP) Joint Forum was held virtually on 8-9 September 2021. Under the theme, “Build back better for healthy air, healthy planet”, the meeting showcased efforts in Asia to beat air pollution and discuss opportunities to accelerate clean air solutions, contribute to carbon neutrality, and support socio-economic recovery. More information is available here: <https://cleanairweek.org/about/>

Publications

- Cohen, B., Cowie, A., Babiker, M., Leip, A. and Smith, P. 2021. Co-benefits and trade-offs of climate change mitigation actions and the Sustainable Development Goals. *Sustainable Production and Consumption* 26: 805-813.