

FAQ 17.1 | Will decarbonisation efforts slow or accelerate sustainable development transitions?

Sustainable development offers a comprehensive pathway to achieving ambitious climate change mitigation goals. Sustainable development requires the pursuit of synergies and the avoidance of trade-offs between the economic, social and environmental dimensions of development. It can thus provide pathways that accelerate progress towards ambitious climate change mitigation goals. Factoring in equality and distributional effects will be particularly important in the pursuit of sustainable policies and partnerships, and in accelerating the transition to sustainable development. Using climate change as a key conduit can only work if synergies across sectors are exploited and if policy implementation is supported by national and international partnerships.

The speed, quality, depth and scale of the transition will depend on the developmental starting point, that is, on explicit goals as well as the enabling environment consisting of individual behaviour, mindsets, beliefs and actions, social cohesion, governance, policies, institutions, social and technological innovations, and so on. The integration of both climate change mitigation and adaptation policies in sustainable development is also essential in the establishment of fair and robust transformation pathways.

FAQ 17.2 | What role do considerations of justice and inclusivity play in the transition towards sustainable development?

Negative economic and social impacts in some regions could emerge as a consequence of ambitious climate change mitigation policies if these are not aligned with key sustainable development aspirations such as those represented by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on 'no poverty, energy-, water- and food access', and so on, which could in turn slow down the transition process. Nonetheless, many climate change mitigation policies could generate incomes, new jobs and other benefits. Capturing these benefits could require specific policies and investments to be targeted directly towards including all parts of society in the new activities and industries created by the climate change mitigation policies, and that activities that are reduced in the context of transitions to a low-carbon future, including industries and geographical areas, are seeing new opportunities. Poor understanding of how governance at multiple levels can meet these challenges to the transition may fail to make significant progress in relation to national policies and a global climate agreement. It may therefore either support or weaken the climate architecture, thus constituting a limiting factor.

FAQ 17.3 | How critical are the roles of institutions in accelerating the transition and what can governance enable?

Institutions are critical in accelerating the transition towards sustainable development: they can help to shape climate change response strategies in terms of both adaptation and mitigation. Local institutions are the custodians of critical adaptation services, ranging from the mobilisation of resources, skills development and capacity-building to the dissemination of critical strategies. Transitions towards sustainable development are mediated by actors within particular institutions, the governance mechanisms they use as implementing tools and the political coalitions they form to enable action. Patterns of production and consumption have implications for a low-carbon development, and many of these patterns can act as barriers or opportunities towards sustainable development. Trade policies, international economic issues and international financial flows can positively support the speed and scale of the transition; alternatively, they can have negative impacts on policies that may inhibit the process. Nonetheless, contextual factors are a fundamental part of the change process, and institutions and their governance systems provide pathways that can influence contextual realities on the ground. For instance, politically vested interests may lead powerful lobby groups or coalition networks to influence the direction of the transition, or they could put pressure on a given political elite through the imposition of regulatory standards, taxation, incentives and policies that may speed or delay the transition process. Civil-society institutions, such as NGOs or research centres, can act as effective governance 'watchdogs' in the transition process, particularly when they exercise a challenge function and question government actions in respect of transitions related to sustainable development.