The vast majority of the world's rising energy demand will come from emerging markets, not from affluent countries. This energy will power economic development, lifting millions out of poverty and improving living standards. And if this energy comes mostly from clean sources like nuclear, it will set the world on a course to substantially limit climate change.

More than 30 countries have expressed interest in or taken concrete steps toward developing their first nuclear power plant in the next decade, and many others wish to expand their nuclear capacity.

However, in some of these countries, groups have formed to oppose new nuclear projects. Achieving a socially sustainable future for nuclear power in the emerging markets requires developers, utilities, governments, and other stakeholders to understand and address activists' concerns.

UNDERSTANDING ACTIVISTS’ CONCERNS

In contrast with historical anti-nuclear movements in Europe and the United States, anti-nuclear activists in emerging economies today are not opposed to nuclear power per se. Rather, they are concerned that new nuclear plants will:

• Hurt the local economy, jeopardize jobs, and damage the local environment that people depend on for their living.
• Unfairly benefit urban residents and the wealthy rather than local communities.
• Be mismanaged and unsafe due to governmental corruption and incompetence.

INITIATIVES TO ADDRESS ACTIVISTS’ CONCERN

Activists’ concerns are valid and understandable, and governments and other stakeholders should take action to address them. The following are potential strategies for doing so.

BRING MORE BENEFITS TO LOCAL COMMUNITIES

• Negotiate price agreements for local produce in agriculture or fishing communities. The utility could agree to purchase a set percentage of the community's goods at a fair price during the plant's operation and could establish social enterprises to help the community market their goods more effectively.
• Offer a share of electricity sales from the plant. This “nuclear dividend” could reassure the community that the plant will offer ongoing income.
• Establish technical colleges and offer job opportunities for local people.
• Connect local communities to the grid. These grid connections could be supplied free and be powered by the construction sites' own generators. Once online, the nuclear power plant itself would supply this power.
ADDRESS PERCEIVED RISKS TO THE LOCAL ECONOMY AND ENVIRONMENT

- Arrange meetings with other “nuclear communities.” Developers could organize meetings with other communities near existing nuclear facilities. In general, local communities should have access to unbiased voices within civil society.

- Invest in the local environment. Don’t just mitigate environmental impacts. Developers could create nature reserves around the plant and take other steps to bolster the health of the local environment.

- Set up participatory environmental monitoring. The developer of a new nuclear facility could establish local environmental monitoring stations and then set up a public display of the results.

BUILD TRUST IN POLITICAL LEADERS AND BUREAUCRACIES

- Delegate decisions to independent agencies. Heads of state would often do better to distance themselves from new nuclear projects. Instead, they could genuinely delegate decisions about new nuclear sites to an independent and transparent planning board that is accountable to the legislature rather than the executive branch.

- Ensure nuclear regulators are truly independent. The government must be clear that the nuclear regulator’s sole function is to oversee the nuclear energy industry. It must have no role or vested interest in promoting nuclear power or in operating or constructing nuclear power plants.

Whatever actions are taken to address activists’ concerns, they should spring from an underlying intention to minimize costs and maximize benefit to local communities. That is how nuclear energy will secure a socially sustainable future in emerging markets.

COUNTRIES FEATURED IN THE IN-DEPTH CASE STUDIES