



# Adaptation Planning Under a Copenhagen Agreement:

## Laying a Foundation for the Projects, Policies, and Capacities that Countries Need

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**As UNFCCC negotiators work to develop shared expectations around adaptation planning, it is critical that they provide a high degree of flexibility to countries, so that planning processes can be domestically “owned” and plans effectively implemented. The UNFCCC should not require countries to undertake specific planning processes or deliver plans in a specific format.**

World Resources Institute Working Papers contain preliminary research, analysis, findings, and recommendations. They are circulated to stimulate timely discussion and critical feedback and to influence ongoing debate on emerging issues. Most working papers are eventually published in another form and their content may be revised.

As climate negotiators, international funders, and national governments begin to develop climate adaptation agendas, it is becoming increasingly urgent to have some shared, operational understanding of planning for adaptation, as well as a shared language for talking about it. This need is all the more urgent given the likely central role of planning in the operation of a facilitative mechanism for matching adaptation action with support, which is on the agenda for the Copenhagen negotiations.

However, the search for globally shared approaches to adaptation planning faces several significant hurdles. What constitutes effective adaptation is highly location-specific, given the large array of potential climate change impacts, the diversity of factors that shape vulnerability, the variation in institutional arrangements across countries, and the wide range of potential adaptation strategies and measures. Moreover, countries are not starting from zero. Given the overlap of adaptation activities with other development activities,<sup>1</sup> every country already has its own adaptation-relevant capacities and experiences as well as existing development priorities that affect its adaptation pathway. It is vital that any globally shared approach to adaptation planning accommodate this diversity by providing countries with the flexibility they need to undertake planning processes and implement adaptation actions that are appropriate for their circumstances. A prescriptive approach to planning risks placing a further administrative burden on developing countries, and a further barrier to accessing support.

### QUALITIES OF A FLEXIBLE PLANNING APPROACH

A globally shared approach to adaptation planning that provides countries with the necessary flexibility will need to do several things:

- **Recognize that adaptation is a capacity-building process.** Adaptation will be ongoing for decades – if not centuries – with distinct but inter-

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related needs at the short-, medium-, and long-term timescales. In this context, building the capacities that enable countries to be adapting on an ongoing basis is just as important as undertaking particular adaptation activities.<sup>2</sup> Any given adaptation plan is just one step in this process – none can be expected to be 100% complete, covering everything that will be needed. The fact that no planning process will ever cover all aspects of needed adaptation in a country should not be grounds for delaying action or support.

- **Take a “learning by doing” approach.** Given the newness of the need to adapt, and the many uncertainties associated with climate change, countries will inevitably make mistakes with adaptation. Action should not be delayed on account of this inevitability. Rather, being ready to quickly adjust activities based on lessons that emerge from mistakes should be seen as a core aspect of what it means to be adapting.<sup>3</sup>
- **Involve many different actors.** The specific roles of key players in adaptation will be different in different countries, but almost all countries will need to involve a range of ministries, a range of non-governmental stakeholders, and decision-makers at national, sub-national, and local levels. Processes that enable meaningful, timely engagement of these players will be critical for success.
- **Recognize that each country starts in a unique place and will take a unique path.** Some countries will start adapting based on a national political mandate; others will begin “from the bottom up” based on a diversity of local projects. In some places, particular sectors or particular segments of the population will move forward more rapidly than others, depending upon their needs and strengths. Any globally shared approach to adaptation planning needs to recognize that any of these starting points can provide a good basis upon which to build an effective national approach to adaptation.

Just as important, a globally shared approach to adaptation planning will need to be carefully designed NOT to do three potentially counterproductive things:

- **It should not require that plans be delivered in a specific format.** Some countries already have National

Adaptation Programs of Action (NAPAs); others are working on comprehensive national adaptation strategies. Others will choose to “climate-proof” existing national planning documents. Still others will call for important planning to be done at state, provincial, or district levels, rather than producing a central national plan.

- **It should not require that countries undertake a specific planning process.** Given the diversity of possible approaches to adaptation, and the wide array of national circumstances across countries, no single step-by-step planning sequence is likely to apply equally well in a large number of countries. While some aspects of adaptation planning may be similar across countries, effective planning requires each country to craft a unique planning process that its citizens and institutions can “own.” (Box 1)
- **It should not make assumptions about the institutional arrangements countries will use for adaptation planning and implementation.** Just as different countries will use different formats and different planning processes, they will also engage different sets of domestic institutional players. NGOs and environment ministries often have been the first to “wake up” to the need for adaptation; financial, agricultural, parliamentary, business, and other players are engaging at different paces in different countries. Moreover, this picture is likely to be very dynamic in many places for some time to come. Planning mandates from the global community should be careful not to take a one-size-fits-all approach as this institutional evolution unfolds.

## ADAPTIVE PLANNING: BUILDING ON STRENGTHS, FILLING IN GAPS, LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE

In consultation with a broad range of experts and stakeholders, the World Resources Institute (WRI) is leading the development of a new way of thinking about adaptation planning, intended to assist in developing an approach that meets the above criteria. This approach views adaptation as an organic process that inevitably will grow and evolve in unexpected ways, since every country has a unique set of actors who play different roles in adaptation. We can think of the institutional relationships between these actors as an “adaptation system” that can support ongoing adaptation by

each member of the system, much as ecological relationships support the well-being of organisms in an ecosystem.

WRI's approach to adaptation planning – called the National Adaptive Capacity (NAC) Framework<sup>4</sup> – takes as its starting

#### Box 1 **Legitimacy and Planning: How Can a Global Agreement Support Local Priorities?**

The history of global environmental agreements is not one of accommodating countries' location-specific needs and strengths. Many past agreements have only legitimized priorities identified through planning processes created specifically with reference to the agreement, not through existing national political processes.<sup>5</sup> The resulting lack of national "ownership" has led to numerous implementation failures, which have contributed to frustration and mistrust, both between negotiating partners and among key constituencies inside countries. Climate negotiators may be tempted to respond to these failures by crafting a highly project-oriented, NAPA-like<sup>6</sup> approach to adaptation, since broad political ownership often is not necessary to successfully implement a project. However, a growing number of countries are moving forward with longer-term, strategic approaches to adaptation planning, and many have called in the negotiations for support that addresses short-, medium-, and long-term adaptation needs.<sup>7,8</sup> While NAPAs should continue to play an important role in the short term, a project-oriented approach to identifying priorities is unlikely to accommodate countries' interests in developing more strategic approaches over time.

More to the point, the question of "project-based" vs. "strategic" does not reach the heart of the matter of what makes a planning process legitimate. Ballesteros et al<sup>9</sup> conclude that institutions and processes – whether national or global – can and should derive their legitimacy from the same factors: transparency, inclusiveness, and accountability. The over-arching question for negotiators is how a global agreement can best support practical, flexible planning processes that meet these criteria, irrespective of whether countries choose projects or broader planning.

point the idea that all national adaptation systems will need to perform a similar set of functions if adaptation is to proceed effectively. This includes, for example, assessment of vulnerability, coordination of different adaptation actors, and management of climate-relevant information (Table 1). Of course, in different countries these functions may be *performed* very differently – in different sequences, by different actors, with different values and emphases – but the core *function* will be essentially the same.

From this perspective, an element of adaptation planning that can be appropriately shared across countries is to understand the ability of a country's current adaptation system to perform key functions. Assessing the performance of key adaptation functions can help identify gaps in the system that need to be filled and strengths upon which countries can build. Moreover, a variety of planning and implementation processes can be used to do such building and filling, according to countries' national circumstances and existing practices. In many cases, planning and implementation will already be ongoing, at least at the project level, and can be mapped against gaps and strengths as a cross-check, rather than starting planning from scratch. Figure 1 illustrates how an assessment of adaptation functions can play into an adaptive planning cycle.

Figure 1. **Adaptive Planning Cycle**

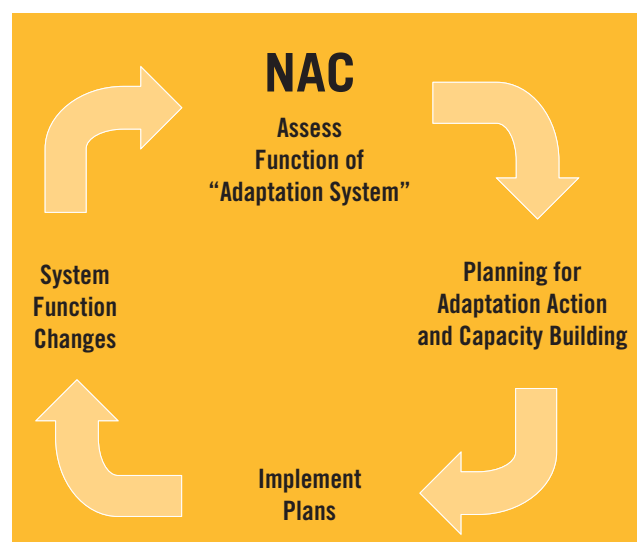


Table 1 **Key National Adaptation Functions**

<b>Assessment</b>	Assessment is the process of examining available information to guide decision-making. Adaptation is likely to require iterative assessments over time, including assessments of vulnerability, climate change impacts, adaptation practices, and the climate sensitivity of development activities.
<b>Prioritization</b>	Prioritization means assigning special importance to particular issues, areas, sectors, or populations. For adaptation, prioritization at the national level usually takes into account projected geographic distribution of climate change impacts, as well as differential vulnerability to the impacts of climate change among a country's population. Effective processes for prioritization will engage a wide range of stakeholders, will be made transparent to the public, and will enable review and adjustment of priorities as circumstances change.
<b>Coordination</b>	Adaptation requires action by disparate actors at multiple levels, both within and outside of government. Coordination of their activities helps avoid duplication or gaps, and can create economies of scale in responding to challenges. Coordination may be horizontal (e.g., among ministries), vertical (e.g., among national, global, and sub-national actors), or inter-sectoral (e.g., between government and business).
<b>Information Management</b>	Information management consists of collecting, analyzing, and disseminating knowledge in support of adaptive activities. Relevant information will vary, but at a minimum typically covers climate variables, the status of natural and human systems, and existing coping strategies. Good information management will ensure that information is useful and accessible to stakeholders. It may also involve general awareness-raising, or building the capacity of stakeholders to use information for adaptation.
<b>Climate Risk Reduction</b>	Different development priorities will face different risks from climate change. Addressing these risks depends on the above adaptation functions, but also requires a distinct process of identifying specific risks to a given priority, evaluating the full range of options for addressing the risks, and then selecting and implementing risk reduction measures. Many risk reduction measures will entail changing practices in the areas of infrastructure, natural resources management, or social protection. For some countries, it may be useful to treat these three sets of activities as adaptation functions in their own right.
Source: WRI 2009	

## CONCLUSION

As UNFCCC negotiators work to develop shared expectations around adaptation planning, it is critical that they provide a high degree of flexibility to countries, so that planning processes and the resulting adaptation actions can be domestically “owned” and effectively implemented. Viewing adaptation as an iterative process of improving the function of a system over time can help foster this flexibility, while still building an approach to adaptation planning that has globally shared elements. The NAC Framework provides a typology of adaptation functions that can be used as the basis for such an approach.

## For More Information

A detailed version of the NAC framework can be found on the WRI website at <http://www.wri.org/publication/national-adaptive-capacity-framework>; its precursor, the “Bellagio Framework for Adaptation Assessment and Prioritization” can be found at <http://www.wri.org/publication/bellagio-framework-for-adaptation-assessment-and-prioritization>.

NAC is being piloted as an assessment tool in several developing countries and will be revised based upon this practical experience in 2010. For further information, please contact Heather McGray at [hmcgray@wri.org](mailto:hmcgray@wri.org).

## Notes

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