

Climate Change Expert Group

Communicating Progress in National and Global Adaptation to Climate Change

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EXPANDED SUMMARY

This is an expanded summary of the CCXG paper “Communicating Progress in National and Global Adaptation to Climate Change”, published in May 2016. The full paper can be downloaded at www.oecd.org/environment/cc/ccxg.htm.

The ideas expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent views of the OECD, the IEA, or their member countries, or the endorsement of any approach described herein.

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FOREWORD

This document was prepared by the OECD and IEA Secretariats in response to a request from the Climate Change Expert Group (CCXG) on the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The Climate Change Expert Group oversees development of analytical papers for the purpose of providing useful and timely input to the climate change negotiations. These papers may also be useful to national policy-makers and other decision-makers. Authors work with the CCXG to develop these papers. However, the papers do not necessarily represent the views of the OECD or the IEA, nor are they intended to prejudge the views of countries participating in the CCXG. Rather, they are Secretariat information papers intended to inform Member countries, as well as the UNFCCC audience.

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Expanded Summary

The Paris Agreement, adopted by the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), reinforces the international framework for adaptation action by establishing a global adaptation goal of enhancing adaptive capacity, strengthening resilience and reducing vulnerability. Under the Paris Agreement, countries have also agreed to an enhanced transparency framework for action, including adaptation, with built-in flexibility. However, adaptation reporting is not mandatory, as the Paris Agreement states that Parties “should”, as appropriate, submit and update an “adaptation communication” (Article 7.10). Decision 1/CP.21 states that this information “shall” be submitted biennially for all countries other than Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS) (paragraph 90).

The Paris Agreement also stresses that adaptation reporting needs to avoid creating any additional burden for developing country Parties (Article 7.10). Regular reporting on adaptation is already done under the UNFCCC, including via national communications (NCs). The majority of countries have also included information on adaptation in their intended nationally determined contributions (INDCs) communicated to the UNFCCC. The Paris Agreement has indicated that Parties “should” submit and update “adaptation communications”. These communications can be a standalone document or part of other documents such as a nationally determined contribution, a NC, or a national adaptation plan, NAP (Article 7.11). One way of minimising the reporting burden would be to report adaptation communications as part of existing reporting tools (e.g. NCs), and to maximise the overlap between what is included in these reports and information needed for efficient national adaptation planning and implementation.

There are potential benefits both at a national and an international level from identifying and collating adaptation-related information. At a national level, these benefits could include communicating priorities in adaptation-related needs and actions, evaluating progress towards any national goals, and identifying where support for adaptation is needed. While international reporting of such information would require some resources, this is likely to be small compared to those needed to identify and collate the relevant information for national purposes. International reporting of a country’s adaptation response may also bring further benefits such as attracting international support for proposed adaptation actions or plans. Increased availability of information on adaptation could also be beneficial to the global community, by helping to identify and disseminate lessons learned in planning, implementing and funding adaptation. Further, the global stocktake of collective progress towards the purpose of the Paris Agreement and its long-term goals would also benefit from adaptation-related information submitted by Parties, and potentially by other organisations. Indeed, there has already been a range of adaptation-related information communicated through NCs and NAPs as well as shared at workshops and meetings within and outside UNFCCC initiatives.

Key issues are thus whether and how adaptation-related information can most efficiently be identified and collated by countries in order to meet their national needs, as well as reported to the international community. This paper explores what elements of countries’ adaptation responses could be reported under the Paris Agreement so as to better communicate efforts towards enhanced adaptation and resilience, while avoiding an undue reporting burden.

Many countries communicated information to the UNFCCC in 2015 on their current or planned adaptation responses via their INDCs. National communications (submitted every four years for Annex I countries, and less regularly for most non-Annex I countries) have also provided broad sets of adaptation-related information. More than three-quarters of submitted INDCs have an adaptation component, but their contents vary greatly in terms of their scope, aims, content, clarity, timeline, link with existing policies

including mitigation actions, and “measurability”. This reflects the fact that adaptation is context-specific and changing over time. Only a limited number of adaptation INDCs have specific actions or aims, and quantitative indicators by which progress toward these aims will be assessed. Several other INDCs include qualitative indicators to measure progress and/or indicate that a monitoring system will be developed, but it is not yet clear how progress will be measured through such indicators and systems. This means that many of the current INDCs are likely to face challenges in assessing progress made towards their adaptation-related targets and goals.

National adaptation reporting under the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement

Transparency provisions under the Paris Agreement are to build on the current system for measurement, reporting and review, and adaptation communications need to be submitted and updated without creating additional burden for developing countries. Thus, it is timely to explore a possible structure of an adaptation communication that is conducive to enhancing the national and global benefits while maximising synergies with existing reporting practices (e.g. National Communications). The scope of different UNFCCC-based requests relating to adaptation is outlined in the table below.

Table 1. Scope of different UNFCCC-based requests relating to adaptation

Issue	Paris Agreement		Guidelines for nat'l communications**		NAP guidelines (LEG 2012)
	Adaptation communication	Adaptation implementation, planning*	Annex I (AI) (UNFCCC 2000)	Non-Annex I (NAI) (UNFCCC 2002)	
Adaptation actions, undertakings or efforts	Yes – actions “should” be reported (no further details given)	Yes – implementing actions, undertakings, efforts	Yes – outline of actions “shall” be included	Yes – “shall” include a general description of steps taken	(Focus is on adaptation planning/integration, rather than specific actions)
Adaptation plans	Yes – to be reported (no further details given)	Yes – formulate and implement	Yes – Parties “may” refer to “integrated plans” (for specific areas)	Yes – “may” report on plans	Yes – developing a long-term national adaptation implementation strategy
Impacts and vulnerability (I&V)	No explicit request	Yes – assessing I&V with a view to determining prioritised actions	Yes - shall include info on the expected impacts of climate change	Yes – “should” provide info on vulnerability to adverse impacts of climate change	Yes – countries recommended to report results of new assessments and emerging science
Priorities	Yes	Yes – see above	No explicit request	Partial (to identify most critical vulnerable areas)	Yes – prioritising adaptation in national planning
M&E and learning	No explicit request	Yes	No explicit request	Yes: “encouraged” to provide evaluation of adaptation strategies & measures	Yes, countries are recommended to “monitor and review efforts undertaken” and “reflect lessons learned”
Building resilience	No explicit request	Yes – both for socioeconomic and ecological systems	No explicit request	No explicit request	Yes (implicitly): building resilience is one of the key aims of developing a NAP
Implementation and support needs	Yes	No	n/a	Yes (encouraged to provide...a list of projects proposed for financing; may include information on adaptation measures)	Yes – part of the NAP process is assessing and addressing gaps and needs
Process to formulate NAPs etc.	No explicit request	Yes – explicit mention of the process to formulate and implement NAPs	No explicit request	Yes – “may” report on use of policy frameworks for developing strategies	Yes – the NAP process covers compiling and communicating adaptation plans, and integrating adaptation into broader planning.

* The Paris Agreement indicates that “each Party shall, as appropriate” engage in adaptation planning and implementation.

** The guidelines for National Communications were developed in 1999 for Annex I countries and 2002 for non-Annex I countries.

A possible structure of an adaptation communication is outlined in Table 2 below, based on information needs to identify, assess and prioritise adaptation options, as well as requests specifically mentioned in the Paris Agreement. The table illustrates that there is good match between the information that countries need to meet national aims on adaptation, information that countries are asked or encouraged to report in their National Communications, and information that the Paris Agreement indicates may be included in adaptation communications. This structure could thus alternatively be used for the adaptation chapter of a country's National Communication to minimise reporting resources. This information also coincides with information identified by the Least Developed Country Expert Group as useful for countries in establishing a National Adaptation Plan.

Table 2. Differing information options relating to adaptation reporting tools

Possible structure of an adaptation communication*	Information needed to meet national and global aims	Identified by Paris Agreement relating to adaptation communications	Included in guidelines for:		Needed for global stocktake
			NCs for AI Parties	NCs for NAI Parties	
<i>Section 1: background</i>	<i>Climate impacts and vulnerability</i>	✗	✓	✓	✓
	<i>Information on resilience</i>	✗	✗	✗	✓
	<i>Information on adaptive capacity</i>	✗	✗	✗	✓
Section 2: Actions and plans	Adaptation plans/strategies	✓	✓	✓	✓ (dev'g countries)
	Adaptation priorities	✓	✗	✓	✗
	Planned adaptation actions and expected results	✓(actions), ✗(results)	✗	✓	✗
	Implemented adaptation actions and their results	✓	✓	✓	✓ (dev'g countries)#
	<i>Process to formulate plans and M&E system</i>	✗	✗	✓	✗
<i>Section 3: Goals and progress towards them</i>	<i>National goals related to adaptive capacity, resilience, vulnerability</i>	✗	✗	✗	✓ (dev'g countries)
	<i>Results from M&E of progress to goals</i>	✗	✗	✓	✗
Section 4: Needs for support for adaptation	Implementation and support needs, and provision of support	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Section 5: Further information, e.g. useful for global stocktake</i>	Effectiveness of support for adaptation	✗	✗	✗	✓
	Effectiveness of adaptation actions	✗	✗	✗	✓
	Adequacy of support for adaptation	✗	✗	✗	✓
	Adequacy of adaptation actions	✗	✗	✗	✓

* NB – topics not explicitly mentioned by the Paris Agreement in the context of an adaptation communication are included in italics.

Note that the global stocktake shall recognise the adaptation efforts of “developing country Parties”.

Table 2 also highlights that there are fewer overlaps between the possible content of individual (country) adaptation communications, and information needed for some of the adaptation aspects of the global stocktake under the Paris Agreement (i.a. reviewing the adequacy and effectiveness of adaptation and support). This implies that achieving these aims of the global stocktake may require further information than that needed purely for ensuring national benefits from identifying and collating adaptation-related information. If this extra information needs to be reported by Parties, it could considerably increase the level of time and resources needed for adaptation reporting, which may not be consistent with the concept of avoiding additional burden for developing country Parties.

Global stocktake and adaptation communications

The global stocktake under the Paris Agreement has four adaptation-related aims, and explicitly references adaptation communications in one of them. Table 3 summarises those four aims of the global stocktake, the ease of achieving each aim, and identifies possible options to conduct the global stocktake. Among four aims of the global stocktake, it would be relatively straightforward to achieve “recognising the adaptation efforts of developing countries”. Another aim “enhancing the implementation of adaptation action” can be met indirectly. The other two aims of the global stocktake may be more difficult to achieve (i.e. to review the adequacy and effectiveness of adaptation and support for adaptation, and to review the overall progress towards the global adaptation goal – particularly if this is to be done in a quantitative manner).

It would be difficult to conduct a robust assessment of the adequacy and effectiveness of adaptation and support for adaptation, if it is to be based on country-reported information. This is because countries are not explicitly asked to report on adaptation effectiveness, and effectiveness is challenging to measure in an objective. Further, decision 1/CP.21 gives flexibility to developing countries in reporting on the scope, levels of detail and frequency of i.a. their national adaptation response and needs. Therefore, it is unlikely that information reported will be consistent or timely across countries. Other possible technical or political challenges include: defining what adaptation support comprises; identifying what levels of support would be “adequate” and/or “effective”; and disentangling finance for “adaptation” from development funding. Non-comprehensive, qualitative assessments of the level of adaptation actions and support may be relatively straightforward to carry out at an aggregate level. However, this is not as broad as assessing the adequacy or effectiveness of adaptation and adaptation support at a global level.

Assessments of “the overall progress made in achieving the global goal on adaptation” could also be qualitative rather than quantitative. The reporting flexibility allowed for in individual Parties’ adaptation communications is likely to lead to differences in what is reported to the UNFCCC by Parties, and when. This might also make it difficult to use such information to track the progress towards the three individual aspects of the global adaptation goal agreed on in the Paris Agreement (i.e. enhancing adaptive capacity, strengthening resilience, and reducing vulnerability). The typical characteristics of adaptation, which is context-specific, long-term and changing over time, can also impede such assessments – which may explain why assessments of the same issue done by different organisations in different ways can lead to such wide variations in results. Moreover, different countries’ adaptation efforts cannot be “translated” into a single unit.

Nevertheless, the global stocktake could indirectly enhance adaptation if it can distil information included in countries’ adaptation communications (or other information submitted) in order to fill knowledge gaps and disseminate lessons learned and provide good examples and practices with regards to policies, approaches and integrated planning or mainstreaming of adaptation. Such information will be useful for improving adaptation plans and enhancing adaptation actions, and may also help to improve their effectiveness in countries and could point to potential areas of cooperation. Information useful for the global stocktake may include not only quantitative or qualitative indicators, but also narratives on, for instance, backgrounds, exposures to climate risks, changes in vulnerability/readiness levels, key success

factors for achievements, and challenges to further improvement. Information from relevant outside processes (e.g. SDGs and the Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction) could also inform the stocktake, as appropriate.

Table 3. Aims of the global stocktake, possible options for achieving them, and associated feasibility and resource needs

Aims of the global stocktake	Feasibility of achieving aim	Resource implications	Possible options
Recognising adaptation efforts of developing countries	High: relatively straightforward to achieve	Low-Medium	Qualitative overview indication of the number of developing countries' specific adaptation efforts
		Medium	Summary report of adaptation efforts
		Low	Collated information on adaptation submitted to (e.g.) a registry
Enhancing implementation of adaptation actions	Medium-High (indirect): filling knowledge gaps within and between countries can help, albeit indirectly	Medium	Summary and synthesis of country information submitted to UNFCCC
		Medium-High	The reports above, strengthened by results from other UNFCCC bodies or organisations
		Low	Increasing the visibility and/or content of the adaptation knowledge resource hub(s)
Reviewing the adequacy and effectiveness of adaptation and support for adaptation	Low: difficult to do thoroughly and objectively, without conflating with non-climate issues	Low-Medium	Qualitative assessment of adaptation effort
		Medium-High	Qualitative assessment of adaptation support, needs
		Medium-High	Trends in extreme events & associated damages and responses
		High	Quantitative assessment of adaptation support & adequacy
		High	Review of effectiveness of adaptation and support
Reviewing overall progress in achieving global adaptation goal	Medium-High (if qualitative); Low (if quantitative)	Low-Medium	Qualitative self-assessment (scorecard)
		Medium-High	Qualitative self-assessment (report)
		Low-Medium	Qualitative assessment based on third-party information.

Information needed to gain national and global benefits

Table 4 highlights examples of (i) the information needed to meet specific national adaptation-related aims, and (ii) the information needed to conduct the four individual tasks of the global stocktake as well as lesson learning between countries. As highlighted above, there is a good match between information needed to gain national-level benefits and information that countries are already requested to report to the UNFCCC via National Communications or other types of documents (e.g. adaptation communications or NAPs) as in Article 7.11 of the Paris Agreement. However, some of these information needs, such as the results from individual adaptation actions or broad adaptation strategies, may be difficult to assess and quantify.

Regarding the global stocktake, the information needed to satisfy national aims is insufficient. For one of the global stocktake tasks (e.g. determining the effectiveness of adaptation and of support for adaptation), some of the information needs will be difficult to meet in a comprehensive and objective manner.

In order to work towards meeting the (sometimes difficult) aims of the global stocktake, either extra information will need to be reported by countries, or such information will need to be gathered from other sources, such as the IPCC or other organisations and relevant outside processes. Communicating

qualitative information for the global stocktake based on countries' self-assessments via a scorecard and/or reports to the UNFCCC (e.g. adaptation communication, National Communication) may be more feasible for countries than reporting quantitative information. Qualitative information based on third-party assessment/analysis (e.g. IPCC assessment reports) could also help to inform the global stocktake while limiting resource requirements for individual countries. However, there can be wide variations in the results of different third-party assessment/analyses. Thus, given that the outcome of the global stocktake is to inform Parties in updating their nationally determined contributions, identifying which third-party sources of information can be used as input to the global stocktake may not be straightforward to agree upon.

Table 4. National and international benefits of identifying, collating and communicating on adaptation, and associated information needs

Types of information needed		National benefits						Global benefits				
		Communicate priorities in needs and actions	Attract and inform international support	Implement/strengthen adaptation actions	Identify progress towards national goals and/or INDC	Better co-ordinate & communicate within a country	M&E for adaptation actions and plans, and foster lesson sharing within a country	Better understand needs of each country for action and support *	Recognise adaptation efforts *	Review adequacy, effectiveness of action and support *	Review progress towards the global adaptation goal *	Share lessons among countries to enhance implementation of adaptation action
Back-ground	Climate impacts and vulnerability	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓			✓	✓
	Information on resilience	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
	Information on adaptive capacity	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Adaptation actions and plans	Adaptation plans/strategies	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓			
	Adaptation priorities		✓			✓		✓				
	Planned adaptation actions and expected results		✓			✓						✓
	Implemented adaptation actions and their results		✓	✓	✓		✓		✓		✓	✓
	Process to formulate plans and M&E system			✓			✓		✓			✓
Adaptation goals and progress	National goals related to adaptive capacity, resilience, vulnerability	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓		✓	✓	✓
	Results from M&E of progress towards goals			✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Needs	Implementation and support needs		✓	✓		✓		✓		✓		
	Support provided or received			✓	✓		✓	✓		✓		
Further information (for global stocktake)	Effectiveness of adaptation support									✓		✓
	Effectiveness of adaptation							✓		✓		✓
	Adequacy of support for adaptation							✓		✓		✓
	Adequacy of adaptation action							✓		✓	✓	✓

* Part of the global stocktake.

Note: Ticks highlight which type of information is needed to meet which aim.

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