

# Adaptation Communications

Balancing utility and flexibility

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Edited by Anju Sharma  
January 2018

**ecbi**

European Capacity Building Initiative  
[www.eurocapacity.org](http://www.eurocapacity.org)

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The authors are grateful to Linda Siegele, Cornelia Jäger, Fred Kossam and Peter With for their comments. Any remaining errors remain our own. The views expressed in this policy brief are our own, and do not reflect the views of any country or group of countries.

## Funding Partner

This project is part of the International Climate Initiative (IKI). The German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety (BMUB) supports this initiative on the basis of a decision adopted by the German Bundestag. For more information on IKI, see [www.international-climate-initiative.com](http://www.international-climate-initiative.com).

It is also supported by SIDA.

Supported by:



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2015 [Paris Agreement](#) places a lot more emphasis on adaptation than previous agreements under the climate regime. The Agreement recognises adaptation as a global challenge and adopts a global goal for adaptation (GGA), while calling for adaptation planning and implementation at all levels; strengthened international cooperation; and, periodic submission and updating of Adaptation Communications.

The Adaptation Communications can play a central role in identifying national needs and enabling international follow-up, while informing future action, driving ambition, and contributing information for the global stocktake (GST) mandated by the Agreement. According to Article 7.10, the Adaptation Communications should communicate national priorities, plans, actions, and implementation and support needs. Further guidance on these Communications is currently being negotiated by Parties to the Paris Agreement under agenda item 4 of the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Paris Agreement (APA). This policy brief considers the state of these negotiations following the 23rd Conference of Parties (COP23) to the UNFCCC in November 2017, and the difficult balancing act that Parties face in developing guidance that will make the Communications useful on the one hand, and avoid placing an additional burden on countries (particularly those with limited capacity) on the other.

According to the Paris Agreement, Adaptation Communications need not constitute a separate, new communicating process. They can be submitted “*as a component of or in conjunction with other communications or documents, including a national adaptation plan, a nationally determined contribution and a national communication*” (Article 7.11). Therefore, different vehicles – including for instance, National Communications, Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) – can be used by Parties. The Communications are also likely to share common elements with these and other reporting and communicating requirements of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Paris Agreement; and be linked to other processes under the Paris Agreement that are being negotiated, including the GST, the Enhanced Transparency Framework (ETF), and the Adaptation Registry.

Parties therefore face the challenge of taking these other reports and processes into account while developing guidance, to minimise duplication; avoid an additional burden; ensure coherence across the architecture of the UNFCCC and Paris Agreement (and beyond); and yet ensure that the Communications are useful and effective in helping countries achieve the GGA. For instance, the guidance will have to take into account how the Adaptation Communications can contribute to the GST; strengthen the review of the adequacy and effectiveness of support for adaptation; assess progress made in achieving the GGA; and maximise synergies with the [Sustainable Development Goals](#) and the [Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction](#). The guidance will also have to ensure that the Adaptation Communications are consistent, irrespective of the choice of the reporting vehicle, to allow for the aggregation of information, where required and appropriate.

At COP23, some progress was made in elaborating and advancing mutual understanding of these various challenges. However, significant work still remains to finalise modalities for the Communications by COP24 in 2018. This policy brief considers challenges in developing further guidance, and makes the following key recommendations for the discussions ahead:

- Parties must find the **right balance between common elements, consistent approaches and the flexibility enshrined in the Paris Agreement** (for instance, by establishing both common and opt in/opt out elements), to ensure the Adaptation Communications fulfil their intended purpose of enhancing adaptation actions. The significant convergence of views in the negotiations so far provides a good basis for reaching consensus on this issue.
- A **simple overarching purpose for Adaptation Communications is recommended, with further**

- **elaboration reflecting the specific aspects of the different communication vehicles**, as required.
- Guidance for the Adaptation Communications should **aim to enhance adaptation action and coherence with other negotiation streams of the Paris Agreement work programme, including the GST, the ETF and the Adaptation Registry**, while taking into account aspects that have already been agreed, such as those contained in Article 7.5. These linkages are necessary to avoid duplication of efforts, and an unnecessary burden on countries.
- **Backward-looking** aspects of the Communications may be of particular relevance for the ETF, to assess progress in implementation (including comparison to previous goals and objectives). **Forward-looking** aspects (such as goals, objectives, future policies and plans, projected support and needs) are of particular relevance to strengthen collaboration, and track future progress (and gaps) towards the GGA.
- The negotiations should focus on the **specifics of the Adaptation Communications in the context of advancing adaptation to the adverse effects of climate change**, rather than aiming to ensure equal negotiation space and pace with mitigation.

## I. A BRIEF HISTORY

The origin of the term “adaptation communications” can be traced back to discussions on the role of adaptation in NDCs, although the notion of a periodic submission of information related to adaptation needs and efforts can be traced back to discussions on the Bali Action Plan. This section describes more recent history, starting from preparations for the Paris Agreement .

### I.1 Adaptation in the INDCs

COP19, held in Warsaw in 2013, concluded with an invitation to Parties to prepare Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs).<sup>1</sup> During the following year, at COP20 in Lima, negotiations focused on developing guidance for preparing and submitting INDCs in advance of the 2015 Paris Conference.

From the perspective of a number of Parties, the INDCs were an instrument to capture a country’s intended mitigation actions as part of a “bottom up” approach to advance collective global mitigation action. Other Parties, however, felt that adaptation had received too little attention in the global negotiations, and voiced the opinion that adaptation should also be included in the INDCs. The former group of Parties argued that this would distract from mitigation and place an additional reporting burdens on developing countries. They pointed to other vehicles to communicate information on adaptation, such as the NAPs.

In the end, the guidance for the INDCs in the **2014 Lima Call for Action** (decision 1/CP.20) included both mitigation and adaptation, but in a very distinct manner. For adaptation, Parties were invited to consider “*communicating their undertakings in adaptation planning or consider including an adaptation component in their intended nationally determined contributions*”. More specific guidance was provided for mitigation, including parameters such as base years, timeframes, and methods for accounting.<sup>2</sup>

A large number of INDCs, in particular from developing countries, included an adaptation component. However, because these were developed without guidance, the adaptation components of INDCs vary widely “*in terms of their scope, aims, content, clarity, specificity, timeline, link with existing policies including mitigation actions, and “measurability”*”.<sup>3</sup>

## I.2 Adaptation Communications in the Paris Agreement

The discussions on communicating adaptation needs and efforts continued to evolve, and eventually resulted in Article 7.10 of the Paris Agreement: *“Each Party should, as appropriate, submit and update periodically an adaptation communication, which may include its priorities, implementation and support needs, plans and actions, without creating any additional burden for developing country Parties”*. This Article is a strong call for all Parties (not only developing country Parties) to submit Adaptation Communications, but not a binding obligation (“should”). It also emphasises the need to avoid additional reporting burdens for developing countries.

Article 7.11 of the Paris Agreement states further that the Communications *“...shall be, as appropriate, submitted and updated periodically, as a component of or in conjunction with other communications or documents, including a national adaptation plan, a nationally determined contribution as referred to in Article 4, paragraph 2, and/or a national communication”*.

This Article can be interpreted as creating an indicative obligation (“shall”) to submit Adaptation Communications and update them periodically. It also provides flexibility in the vehicle used, allowing for an Adaptation Communication to either be part of another reporting document, or submitted separately (but linked to) other reporting documents such as National Communications, NAPs and NDCs.

Further, Article 7.14 and paragraph 99 of the Paris [decision 1/CP.21](#) give Adaptation Communications a specific and explicit role, as input to the GST with two clear dimensions. One, they call on the GST to *“...recognize the adaptation efforts of developing country Parties”; “[r]eview the adequacy and effectiveness of adaptation and support provided for adaptation”; and “[r]eview the overall progress made in achieving the global goal on adaptation...”* to provide insight into progress towards an adequate adaptation response in the context of the temperature goal in Article 2 of the Agreement. Two, they call on the GST to *“[e]nhance the implementation of adaptation action taking into account the adaptation communication..”*. This is a call for guidance to enhance future adaptation action, based on nationally determined needs, priorities, and plans submitted by Parties in their Adaptation Communications, in light of mitigation trajectories.

In addition to calling on the APA to develop guidance, the Paris outcome also calls on the Adaptation Committee and the Least Developed Countries Expert Group (LEG) to undertake additional technical work to inform the preparation of Adaptation Communications. The work of these bodies is important because the extent to which Parties can effectively provide and communicate information on adaptation will determine the quality of the overview of collective adaptation efforts. The collective overview, in turn, will determine the ability of the global community to assess progress in achieving the adaptation-related objective of the Paris Agreement articulated in Article 2.1(b), and the GGA articulated in Article 7.1.

## I.3 Après Paris

Following the adoption of the Paris Agreement, the APA has held discussions on the purpose, elements, vehicles and timing of the Adaptation Communications, possible flexibility for countries, and (briefly) on linkages with other items under negotiation. At the most recent discussions at COP23 in Bonn, in November 2017, Parties went further towards developing guidance for the Adaptation Communications; intensified the discussions on linkages between different issues and negotiation streams; and considered recommendations by UNFCCC constituted bodies such as the Adaptation Committee and the LEG. However, much more work lies ahead in 2018, to finalise the implementation guidelines by COP24, which

will also be part three of the Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement (CMA1-3). This paper is based on the discussions held so far, which have been captured in various UNFCCC papers and reports, and on Party submissions.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. OVERVIEW, SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES AND LINKAGES

The Adaptation Communications provide Parties with the unique opportunity of communicating both action and future needs and priorities to the international community. They can potentially be a central tool within an orchestrated system of legal provisions and procedural elements of the Paris Agreement to drive dynamism and follow-up of national and global adaptation actions.

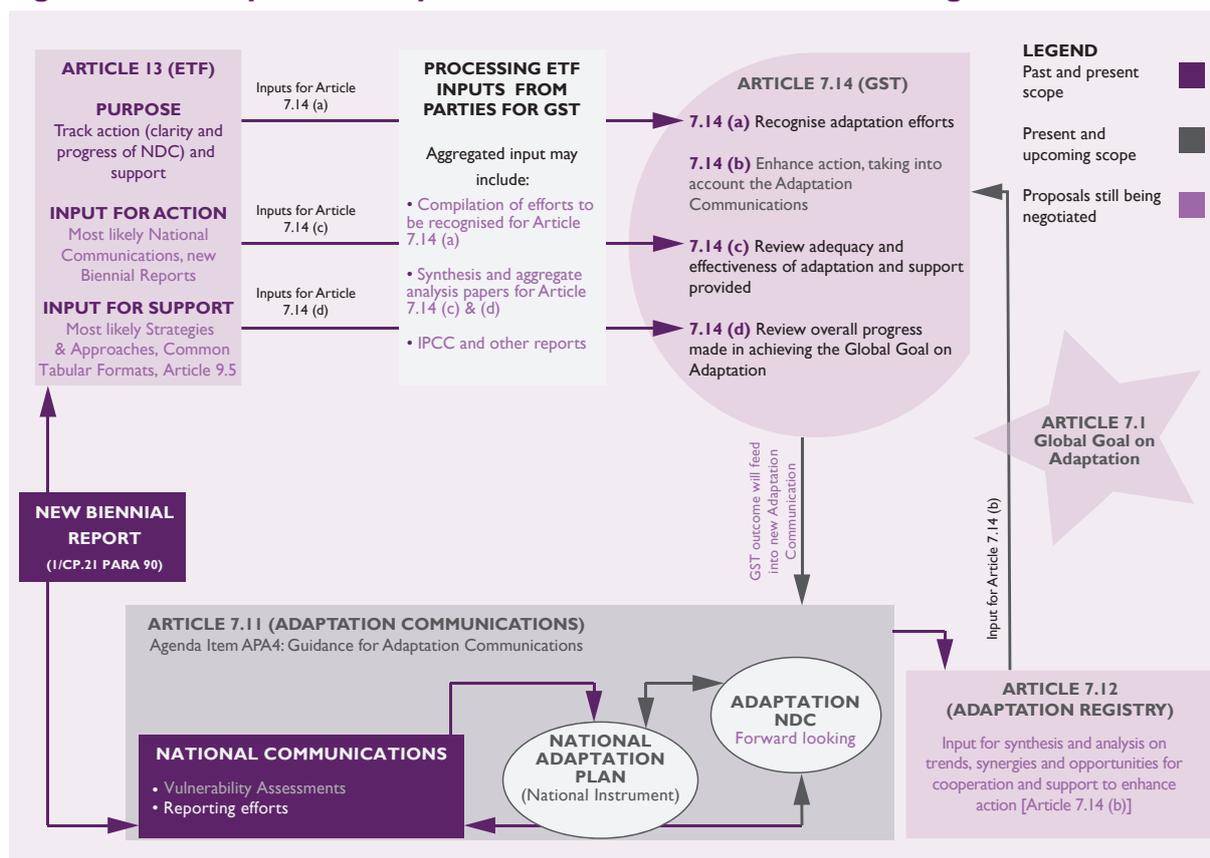
While developing countries are keen to communicate the national adaptation efforts they have undertaken for recognition by the global community, they are also keen to minimise duplication, and avoid an additional reporting burden. Therefore, addressing potential overlaps and linkages with other reporting processes and negotiations streams effectively will be critical. In this context, Parties have also sought flexibility with regard to the Adaptation Communications – including of content, choice of vehicle, timing, and frequency. Flexibility has also been sought for Parties who, for valid reasons, decide not to submit a Communication.

While flexibility is enshrined in the relevant articles of the Paris Agreement, there are potential trade-offs between flexibility on the one hand, and consistency on the other. Finding the right balance will be critical for the effectiveness of the Communications. As laid out in Article 13, moreover, while country ownership, national circumstances and the expression of national priorities are all underlying principles of the Adaptation Communications, the Communications should also be designed to facilitate international collaboration. Careful design choices and trial and error will be necessary to allow the system to evolve over time.

The potential linkages between the Adaptation Communications and different elements of the Paris Agreement are illustrated in **Figure 1**. The Paris Agreement provides flexibility regarding possible vehicles that Parties may choose from, as stated earlier. Each vehicle mentioned in Article 7.10 has a specific purpose. For instance, if National Communications are chosen by a Party as the vehicle for Adaptation Communications, they can play a dual role and provide both backward- and forward-looking information. Paragraph 32 of [decision 5/CP.17](#), adopted at COP17 in Durban, South Africa in 2011, already invites Parties to report on measures and support provided and received for their NAP process through their National Communications. The new element that the Adaptation Communications will bring is the forward-looking information that Parties submit through existing vehicles such as the National Communications, NAPs, and adaptation components of NDCs. The information will be housed in the Adaptation Registry, regardless of the vehicle used by Parties.

According to Article 13 of the Paris Agreement, the ETF will track progress of action and support on the basis of different reports. It is expected that these will mainly be the biennial reports mentioned in paragraph 90 of [decision 1/CP.21](#), or the National Communications which are the traditional reporting vehicle. This information will need to be processed to inform the GST in accordance with the adaptation specific elements laid out in Article 7.14 (a), (c) and (d). The overall objective of these processes will be to enhance the implementation of adaptation action and ensure progress towards the GGA – the "guiding star" of the adaptation regime.

**Figure 1: Follow up of the Adaptation Communications in the Paris Agreement**



Source: Suárez Pérez, Irene (2017). *What adaptation information would be needed and how could it contribute to the enhancement of Parties' actions and support on adaptation?* OECD, Paris.

## 2.1 Guiding principles for Adaptation Communications

Several principles have been highlighted by Parties during discussions on the Adaptation Communications. Many of these are already part of the Paris Agreement – such as country ownership, common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, and avoiding additional burdens on developing countries. The principles enshrined in Article 7.5 of the Paris Agreement (calling, for instance, for gender-responsive climate action, and for taking into account vulnerable groups, communities and ecosystems) are of particular relevance from the perspective of good adaptation practices. Others that were raised during the COP23 discussions, such as clearly articulating the link between mitigation action and adaptation needs, can help locate the Adaptation Communications in the bigger picture.

While these principles are on a list that is being discussed in the negotiations, the discussions are currently dominated by divergent views on whether principles should be part of the guidance for Adaptation Communications at all, or whether they will add unnecessary complexity.

## 2.2 Purpose of Adaptation Communications

Agreement on the purpose of Adaptation Communications is another obvious starting point for finding common ground on the guidelines. Three emerging options for the purpose these Communications are summarised in **Table 1**, derived from an informal paper summarising COP23 discussions.

Table 1: Considerations of elements/purpose of Adaptation Communications		
Option 1	Option 2	Option 3
Communicate national adaptation priorities, implementation and support needs, and plans and actions		Communicate national adaptation actions, plans, priorities, implementation and support needs.
Contribute and inform progress towards the global goal for adaptation, and inform the review of overall progress towards that goal	Contribute and inform progress towards the global goal for adaptation	
Provide input to the GST		
Recognition of adaptation efforts		
Strengthen visibility and profile of adaptation / parity with mitigation		Raise the profile of adaptation/parity with mitigation
Enhance and catalyse actions and support for developing countries	Enhance actions and support for developing countries	Enhancing support for adaptation actions and plans/catalyse support to implement communicated adaptation action for developing countries
Facilitate clarity, transparency and understanding of adaptation actions and support provided	Enhance learning and understanding of adaptation, sharing experiences and good practices	
Enhance understanding of adaptation needs		
Help countries build and retain capacity		
Enhance learning and understanding of adaptation by sharing lessons, experiences, evidence and good practices		
Inform future decisions under the UNFCCC on adaptation		
<b>Source:</b> Based on UNFCCC (2017). <i>APA Agenda item 4. Informal note by the co-facilitators – final iteration.</i>		

While the Table reveals a high degree of convergence on several main elements, Parties have not yet agreed that a simple formulation for an overarching purpose will be sufficient. The Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) has proposed that the purpose of the Adaptation Communications should be “*to communicate adaptation actions and plans, with a view to enhancing action and support and contributing to the global goal on adaptation*”.<sup>5</sup> A simple formulation such as this one could help to focus the discussion on the elements of the Communications, their relative relevance in different vehicles, interlinkages, coherence, and a reduced burden.

There has been some discussion, among developing countries in particular, whether “recognition of efforts” (the actions countries take on their own) should be highlighted as part of the purpose, or left as an optional element for those Parties who wish to include a full report on national efforts. This divergence is reflected in Table 1, where recognition of efforts is not included in option 3. Some Parties are concerned that including it could increase the reporting burden, given that reporting processes for recognising adaptation efforts already exist (such as the National Communications). Another concern around the recognition of adaptation efforts is whether this could gradually lead to increased scrutiny and/or calls for “verification” of actions that countries undertake without outside international support. However, the Paris Agreement does not mandate a verification process for adaptation. To gather a realistic picture of progress toward the GGA, adequate information on all adaptation action undertaken by Parties, both with their own resources and with outside support, will be necessary.

## 2.3 Elements of Adaptation Communications

What key elements should the Adaptation Communications include? The co-facilitators of the discussion on the Communications astutely note that “*purpose and elements are clearly interconnected, indicating that on the one hand, purposes guide the choice of elements, but, on the other, many elements contribute to multiple purposes*”.<sup>6</sup> Summarising the discussions before COP23,<sup>7</sup> the co-facilitators noted that:

- The choice of elements included in the Adaptation Communications should be flexible, but robust enough to enable the operationalisation of the GGA and the conduct of the GST.
- Guidance on common elements should be applicable to all different vehicles (such as the NDCs, National Communications, and NAPs).
- There should be clarity on which elements are common, and which one are additional elements.
- Forward- and backward-looking elements should be included, without specifying strict timeframes.
- The list of elements should be non-exhaustive, reflecting collective progress; national dimensions stipulated in Articles 7.9 and 7.10 of the Paris Agreement; and cooperative dimensions in Article 7.
- The element should include information on what is measurable over the long term, bearing in mind the specific challenges of measuring the impact of adaptation action.

At COP23, many of these elements were reiterated. There was also a better understanding of which elements are regarded as important, based partly on the elements that Parties put forward in their National Communications, NAPs, and NDCs.<sup>8</sup> **Table 2** summarises three main options emerging from COP23. Option 1 distinguishes a set of common elements from a set of opt-in/opt-out options (in contrast to option 2). Option 3 is specifically related to the NDCs as one vehicle for Adaptation Communications.

The Table indicates considerable convergence on a number of elements with only slight differences in formulation, but also areas of divergence. One area of divergence relates to the level of consistency that should be required between Adaptation Communications from different Parties, for the Communications to be effective in informing the GST. A common set of elements will be necessary for this purpose, regardless of the vehicles Parties choose, while recognising the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, in light of different national circumstances. But Parties have expressed concerns in recent discussions that agreeing to a set of common elements could imply that Communications are later assessed for compliance on reporting against these elements.<sup>9</sup> A pragmatic solution could be to agree on a “headline” list of basic common elements that all Communications should include, with a stipulation that if a country chooses to exclude of these elements, it provides a reason (for instance, because the information is already contained in another report). More detailed guidance could include “sub-elements” under each headline element as optional elements, potentially distinguished by reporting vehicle, as appropriate (illustrated in **Figure 2**, presented at a roundtable discussion preceding COP23).

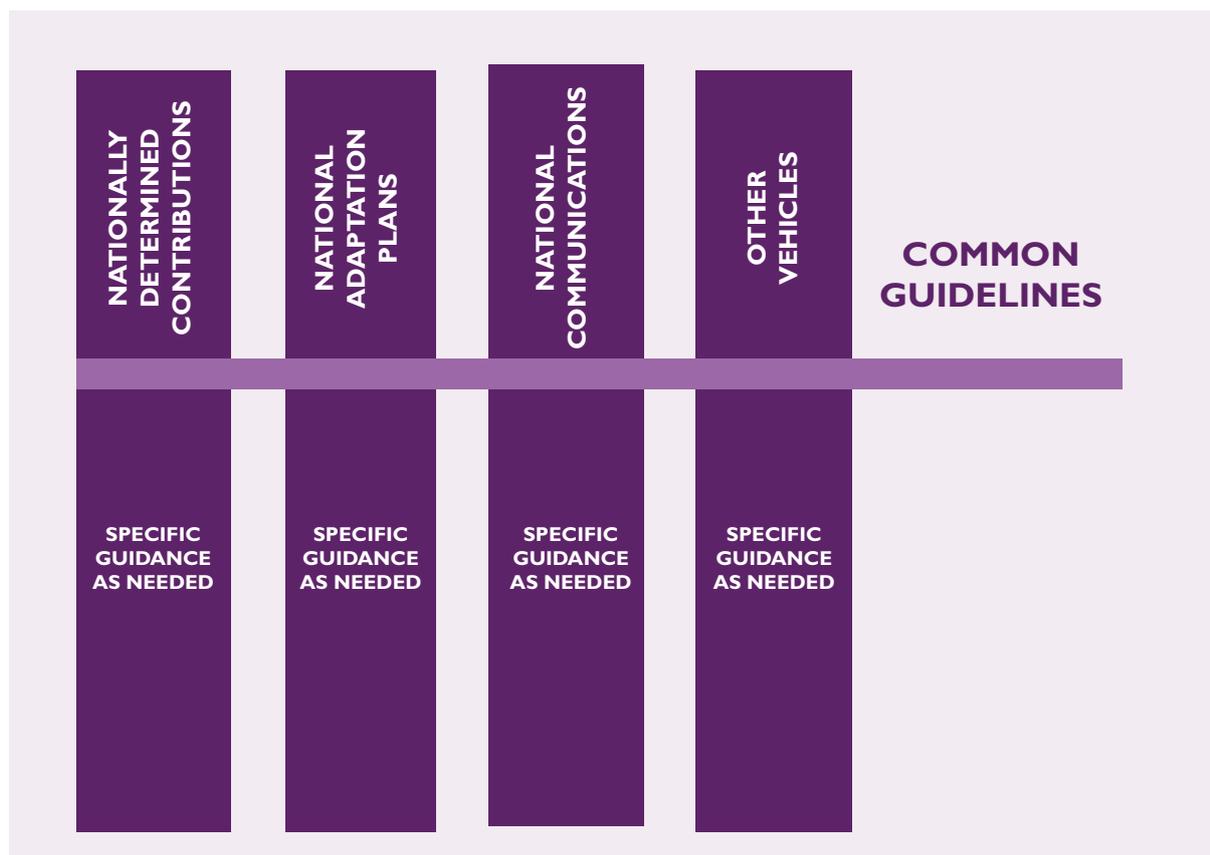
Another area of discussion relates to whether loss and damage associated with the adverse impacts of climate change should form part of the Adaptation Communications. Several countries, such as the Philippines, have included loss and damage aspects in their NDCs. While loss and damage is addressed in Article 8 of the Paris Agreement, in practice, a country’s approach to planning for, and implementing, adaptation action may include the identification of the limits to adaptation, or the extent to which loss and damage limits adaptive capacity.

A third area of discussion related to elements of the Adaptation Communications is whether developed countries (and potentially others, in light of Article 9) should be expected to include information on the support they have provided, and/or plan to provide, to developing countries. This information is essential for the GST, but it could be included in other reporting frameworks, such as the biennial reporting of support provided and mobilised under the ETF. Existing reporting channels also cover reporting on the provision

**Table 2: Different options and the proposed elements for Adaptation Communications**

Option 1	Option 2	Option 3 Adaptation elements for NDCs
<b>A. Common set of elements</b>		
National circumstances	National circumstances, including population, levels of development, legal frameworks and institutions	National circumstances
Impacts, vulnerabilities and risk assessments	Expected impacts, risks and vulnerability and adaptive capacity	Impacts, vulnerabilities and risk assessments (including future scenarios)
	National goals related to adaptation, resilience, and reducing vulnerability	Timeframe
Adaptation priorities, policies, plans, actions, strategies and/or programmes, as appropriate	Adaptation priorities, plans, strategies, planned actions, resilience-building activities and expected results	Adaptation priorities, politics, plans, actions, strategies and/or programmes, if applicable
Adaptation support needs of developing country Parties	Implementation and support needs, including costs of meeting these needs	Adaptation support needs of developing country Parties
Adaptation efforts of developing countries (for recognition)		
Communication of indicative projected levels of public financial resources to be provided by developed country Parties to developing country Parties, including finance, technology and capacity building		Communication of indicative projected levels of public financial resources to be provided by developed country Parties to developing country Parties, including finance, technology, and capacity-building Means of implementation
<b>B. Additional / opt in opt out</b>		
Information on adaptation actions that result in mitigation co-benefits	Co-benefits of adaptation	Information on adaptation actions that result in mitigation co-benefits, if applicable Information on sustainable development efforts, if applicable
Cooperative dimension at the national, regional and international level	Cooperation to enhance adaptation at national, regional and international levels	
Progress on implementing adaptation actions and plans	Implementation and results achieved	
Economic diversification	Economic diversification plans	Information on economic diversification efforts, if applicable
Adaptation efforts of developing countries (for recognition)		
Traditional knowledge or community based adaptation climate change and local communities' involvement		Traditional knowledge or community-based adaptation climate change and local communities' involvement, if applicable
Legal framework and institutional arrangements as appropriate		
Monitoring and evaluation	Monitoring and evaluation, and approaches used	
	Information on synergies with other international conventions	
	Good practices, lessons learned and information sharing	
	Barriers for implementation of adaptations, challenges, and gaps	
	Adaptation actions currently under implementation	Contributions to adaptation
<b>Source:</b> Based on UNFCCC (2017). <i>APA Agenda item 4. Informal note by the co-facilitators – final iteration.</i>		

**Figure 2: Vehicle-specific and/or common guidance for Adaptation Communications**



**Source:** Informal input to the APA item 4 roundtable on 4 November 2017.

of support – such as the National Communications and biennial reports, and the report on “*Information on strategies and approaches for mobilizing scaled-up climate finance to USD 100 billion per year by 2020*” which, subject to negotiation, may continue to exist in some form beyond 2020.

## 2.4 Potential vehicles for Adaptation Communications

As we have seen, Article 7.11 of the Paris Agreement states that Parties can submit their Adaptation Communications “...as a component of or in conjunction with other communications or documents, including a national adaptation plan, a nationally determined contribution as referred to in Article 4, paragraph 2, and/or a national communication”. This implies that Parties are not formally required to initiate a completely new process to prepare their Adaptation Communications. However, this is still open to interpretation, and it necessitates further discussions on the specific characteristics of each of the vehicles. At COP23, discussions were also held on common guidance (regardless of vehicle chosen to submit Adaptation Communications), and on whether specific guidance will be necessary for these vehicles (as seen in Figure 2).<sup>10</sup>

The purpose of the NDCs, for instance, is to outline forward-looking objectives and targets for action, with adaptation as a voluntary component. The National Communications are generally backward-looking, and prepared every four years, providing information on actions already undertaken and policies already in place, though envisaged action can also be included. The NAPs, meanwhile, are forward-looking national planning instruments, which may provide a roadmap towards achieving the objectives outlined in the NDCs, and/or more generally national development plans. Only the National Communications and NDCs have clearly defined

timelines – the submission and updating of NAPs is completely voluntary, and does not follow a defined frequency.

Parties also decided that information, including on adaptation, shall be submitted at least biennially (with exceptions for small island developing States and least developed countries) in Article 13.8 of the Paris Agreement (on the ETF). The existing biennial reports (for developed countries) and biennial update reports (for developing countries) focus on mitigation action.<sup>11</sup>

To avoid an increased reporting burden, the relationship between the biennial reports under the ETF and the adaptation information in the National Communications will need to be taken into account. These biennial reports will also be backward-looking like the National Communications, and will focus on providing information on actions undertaken and policies in place with the aim of sharing progress made in achieving the NDCs, lessons learned, and understanding progress toward reaching the global goal on adaptation. Once NDC implementation has started, the National Communications should also be used to report on progress towards implementing the NDCs in line with Article 13.5 of the Paris Agreement. This could be facilitated by harmonising adaptation-related elements of the NDCs and National Communications, and ensuring that this is captured in the guidelines for the preparation of National Communications.

## 2.5 Enhanced Transparency Framework

Article 13 of the Paris Agreement establishes the ETF for climate action and support, building on current transparency arrangements under the UNFCCC, that shall be “*implemented in a facilitative, non-intrusive, non-punitive manner*” (Article 13. 3). The purpose of the ETF is to provide a clear understanding of climate change action (Article 13.5) and support (Article 13.6) related to both mitigation and adaptation; track progress towards achieving NDCs; and inform the GST.

As a primarily backward-looking process, the ETF will draw on existing transparency arrangements under the UNFCCC, including the National Communications, biennial reports and biennial update reports (Article 13.4). While a major point of disagreement at COP23 was whether the ETF would consist of one system applicable to all countries (with flexibility for countries who need them), or whether it would explicitly distinguish between developed and developing countries, this debate was mainly the context of the mitigation elements of the ETF.<sup>12</sup>

Article 13.8 explicitly calls on Parties to “*provide information related to climate change impacts and adaptation under Article 7, as appropriate*”. The NDCs, which may also contain adaptation components, will also be considered under the ETF.

While some guidance already exists for transparency arrangements under the current regime (for instance, on preparing National Communications), it is very broad in scope when it comes to adaptation. To elaborate the linkages between the ETF and the Adaptation Communications, Parties will need to consider the level of detailed adaptation information that is required for the ETF to achieve its purpose, which includes informing the GST and allowing for a collective assessment of adaptation efforts in relation to the GGA.<sup>13</sup>

An informal paper summarising the discussions at COP23 shows that adaptation was covered in significant depth under the ETF agenda item.<sup>14</sup> The discussions reflected on the links between the ETF and matters relevant to the Adaptation Communications – including the Adaptation Communications negotiations themselves, the work of the Adaptation Committee and the LDC Expert Group (LEG), means of implementation, and the GST. The section on adaptation in the informal paper is divided into 11 sub-headings

(see **Table 3**), which are very similar to the elements being discussed for the Adaptation Communications (described earlier). This indicates that the information submitted in the Adaptation Communications could be used for ETF reporting, and the ETF could be a tool to report on the implementation of adaptation efforts identified in the NDCs. It also reflects the clear backward-looking focus of the ETF discussion (with some exceptions – a pure distinction between backward- and forward-looking elements is not always possible for adaptation, given its dynamic nature).

<b>Table 3: Section headings on adaptation in the informal paper on ETF discussions at COP23</b>
D1. Objectives and principles
D2. National circumstances and institutional arrangements
D3. Vulnerabilities, risks and impacts, and methodologies used
D4. Adaptation policies, strategies, plans and actions and efforts to mainstream adaptation into national policies and strategies
D5. Information related to loss and damage
D6. Adaptation priorities, barriers, costs and needs
D7. Progress on implementation of adaptation
D8. Monitoring and evaluation of adaptation actions and processes
D9. Cooperation, good practices, experiences, and lessons learned
D10. Effectiveness and sustainability of adaptation action
D11. Recognition of adaptation efforts
D12. Reporting formats
<b>Source:</b> Compiled from UNFCCC (2017). <i>Modalities, procedures and guidelines for the transparency framework for action and support referred to in Article 13 of the Paris Agreement</i> . Informal note by the co-facilitators, final version.

There is some overlap between the adaptation sections listed in the ETF discussions, and others (for instance D1, D5, D7 and D11) that are deemed unnecessary by some Parties, according to the informal paper. There is therefore potential for consolidating and shortening the list. In any case, consistency between the adaptation requirements under the ETF and the guidance for the Adaptation Communications is essential.

Moreover, parity should not be sought on the level of detail required for mitigation and adaptation under the ETF. The requirements for comparability are different, as are the methodologies for arriving at an understanding of collective efforts. Lack of progress in negotiating the guidelines for one stream (mitigation or adaptation) should not be used to hamper progress on the other.

## 2.6 Global Goal on Adaptation

In Article 7.1 of the Paris Agreement, “Parties hereby establish the global goal on adaptation of enhancing adaptive capacity, strengthening resilience and reducing vulnerability to climate change, with a view to contributing to sustainable development and ensuring an adequate adaptation response in the context of the temperature goal referred to in Article 2.”

(Article 2(b) highlights the objective of “increasing the ability to adapt to the adverse impacts of climate change and foster climate resilience and low greenhouse gas emissions development, in a manner that does not threaten food production”).

The GGA reflects the desire of some developing countries to have a more tangible goal for adaptation for the global community to work towards, much like the global temperature goal does for mitigation. However, the GGA is far less concrete, and does not yet have a timeline or metric for measuring progress. Further work will be carried out on indicators and metrics by the Adaptation Committee, whose work plan for 2018 includes “a meeting to exchange views on national adaptation goals/indicators and how they relate to indicators/goals for

Although there is, as yet, no specific negotiation process on the GGA, Parties and non-Party stakeholders have frequently made a connection between the goal, Adaptation Communications, and the GST. In their submissions, for instance:

- The Independent Association of Latin America and the Caribbean (AILAC) views the GGA as a key point of departure to guide the Adaptation Communications. The GST is viewed as an opportunity for both, a backward-looking assessment of adaptation efforts and support based on inputs from the ETF (in particular, the National Communications); and a forward-looking enhancement of the implementation of adaptation action in light of the GGA and Article 2.1(b) of the Paris Agreement.<sup>16</sup>
- Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay (BAU) view the Adaptation Communications as a tool for Parties to state their long-term visions or goals for national adaptation and how they contribute to the GGA, while also providing an input into the GST.
- The EU sees the Adaptation Communications as a tool to facilitate cooperation and understanding of progress made and the challenges ahead on adaptation action, including towards meeting the GGA.
- The Least Developed Countries (LDCs) highlight the role of the Adaptation Communications as a tool to meet the GGA and promote the effective operationalisation of the ETF, highlighting their importance for informing the GST.<sup>17</sup>

The GGA is viewed by many as having both quantitative and qualitative elements – including metrics, and financial and institutional elements, some of which are expected to be advanced through the technical work mandated to the Adaptation Committee and the LEG.<sup>18</sup>

The Adaptation Communications are a logical source of information to understand how Parties intend to advance their individual efforts towards the GGA. Once implemented, reports from Parties on progress could then be aggregated to understand overall progress towards the GGA. If they choose to include backward-looking information in their Communications, Parties could elaborate on climate vulnerabilities identified at the national level; plans and actions to address those vulnerabilities; expected outcomes; and how the national plans and actions will contribute to the achievement of the GGA. Parties could also elaborate on good practices and lessons learned at different sectoral and geographical levels in the Adaptation Communications, for consideration at the GST. Among other things, the information contained in the Adaptation Communications could facilitate the development of effective methodologies for assessing collective action on adaptation. This also means that all the different vehicles – National Communications, NDCs, NAPs, and potentially others – can contribute information towards the GGA.

## 2.7 Global Stocktake

The GST included in Article 14 is a central element of the long-term approach of the Paris Agreement. The stocktake, which will take place every five years starting from 2023, provides an opportunity to regularly assess progress made in reaching the goals of the Paris Agreement, including the GGA, and agree on future action, including the updating of NDCs. Thus, it will therefore have both backward- and forward-looking elements.

As we saw in section 1.2, Article 7.14(b) makes specific reference to the Adaptation Communications, calling on the stocktake to “[e]nhance the implementation of adaptation action taking into account the adaptation communication”. To fulfil this role, the Adaptation Communications should be designed to provide the GST with the “forward-looking” information necessary to assess progress towards achieving the GGA, and drive the implementation of adaptation actions.

The modalities and inputs of the GST are still being negotiated, and received significant attention at COP23. It is expected that the GST will potentially consist of three phases: a preparatory phase of information gathering; a technical phase for technical considerations and collective progress assessments; and a political phase for the consideration of outputs and next steps.

The Adaptation Communications have remained undisputed as an input into the GST in the discussions, along with expert inputs from constituted bodies such as the Adaptation Committee and the LEG.<sup>19</sup> However, the exact role of the Adaptation Communications, and the specific elements that will be most relevant, have not yet been defined further in the GST negotiations. There have been some proposals – for instance, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development proposes that elements related to national plans and actions; goals and progress towards them; and support needs for adaptation might be most relevant.<sup>20</sup>

While deciding (mandatory and voluntary) timelines, periodicity, and cycles for reporting and provision of inputs for the GST, Parties will need to ensure that the “right” information is available the “right” time, while avoiding duplication of efforts and additional reporting burdens (including the imposition of reporting deadlines). This timeline will have to be linked to the NDC cycle, given that an important goal of the GST is to inform the updating of NDCs, and as seen before, the NDC may be the Adaptation Communication of a Party.

A timeline could also serve for planning and delivering capacity support to facilitate timely information delivery. This does not require fixed and compulsory deadlines, thereby offering flexibility for countries with limited institutional capacities (such as small island developing States or LDCs). If major elements (such as knowledge on climate change impacts or national policies) have not changed significantly between the reporting cycles, updating previous information may also be less of a burden.

Where there is a lack of synchronisation between reporting cycles, Parties may wish to consider either synchronising cycles, or agreeing on methods for achieving comparability of information and data, where required. For example, while NDCs are to be delivered every five years, National Communications are currently supposed to be delivered every four years. Synchronising cycles may not always be possible – for instance in the context of the NAPs (a potential vehicle for Adaptation Communications), where countries have the flexibility to update their NAPs whenever they choose, as the NAPs are a planning tool for national purposes rather than a communication tool. This does not, however, restrict the choice of countries to submit them as input to the GST, if they wish to do so.

**Figure 3** indicates the main agreed elements of the timeline (the GST and the NDC cycle) and sequencing of different reporting requirements, in the context of the GST. It illustrates how the backward-looking aspects under the ETF could inform the upcoming stocktake on progress achieved through past actions, whereas the GST results can inform the forward-looking aspects of the next generation of NDCs and NAPs (where countries chose to update the latter).

**Figure 3: The role of different vehicles for adaptation in the GST**



**Source:** Northrop, E. (2015). *Not Just for Paris, but for the Future: How the Paris Agreement Will Keep Accelerating Climate Action*. 14 December 2015.

## 2.8 Tasks of the Adaptation Committee and LEG

The Adaptation Committee and the LEG have been mandated to complete a number of tasks in time for CMA1/COP24 in 2018, some of which have implications for the Adaptation Communications. Although these bodies met and held intense discussions at COP23, they eventually agreed to continue discussions over 2018,<sup>21</sup> given the ambiguity and complexity of the mandates; linkages with other negotiations; and the fact that tasks are part of a bigger adaptation package.<sup>22</sup> This section discusses the key tasks that these bodies have been mandated to carry out, related to the Adaptation Communications.

### *Develop modalities to recognise the adaptation efforts of developing country Parties*

Article 7.3 of the Paris Agreement states that “the adaptation efforts of developing country Parties shall be recognized” in accordance with modalities to be adopted by the CMA. Article 7.14(a), meanwhile, lists the recognition of “adaptation efforts of developing country Parties” as a purpose of the GST. To operationalise these elements, COP21 mandated the Adaptation Committee and the LEG to jointly develop modalities to recognise the adaptation efforts of developing country Parties.<sup>23</sup>

Developing countries are already investing in adaptation action, to a varying degree depending on their capacities, and the resources available. While this investment can complement other development priorities, there is also the risk that the sheer size of the adaptation challenge will result in diverting resources away from those core development needs. The UNEP *Adaptation Gap Report* (and other similar analyses) reveal that the costs of adaptation in developing countries will be significant, and could range between US\$ 140 - 300 billion by 2030, and between US\$ 280 - 500 billion by 2050, depending on the level of mitigation ambition.<sup>24</sup>

While an agreed set of modalities for reporting adaptation efforts could help highlight additional needs and funding gaps in developing countries, additional reporting requirements could stretch their capacity to document adaptation efforts, and result in duplication (adaptation efforts are already being reported in National Communications). Practically as well, it will be fairly challenging for countries to collect and document all adaptation efforts undertaken. Equally, on the receiving end, it will be challenging for the GST to handle large volumes of adaptation information.

Discussions so far have centred on the possible areas of focus. The AOSIS has proposed documentation of “innovative activities to be identified, enhanced, promoted and replicated”. LDCs have proposed regular summaries

of success stories for all developing countries, while the Africa Group has suggested adaptation actions covered by national budgets (for instance, the percentage of GDP), and good practices and lessons learned. The recognition of adaptation efforts should also include the actions taken, and information provided, by non-government stakeholders. Their active inclusion is also central to the Adaptation Communications, and clearly mandated in Article 7.5 and the preamble of the Paris Agreement.

At a meeting in September 2017, the Adaptation Committee listed the following elements for consideration, based on the submission of views:<sup>25</sup>

- The types of efforts that should be recognised, how to recognise those efforts and who should be recognising them.
- The recognition of efforts should be country-driven and could include: financial, technological and capacity building investments; enabling/facilitating effective processes and systems; NAPs, action plans, strategies or policies; national, sub-national and community level actions; and outcomes and demonstrable results.
- Importance of periodically and comprehensively analysing and synthesising information.

The Adaptation Committee also made a set of recommendations for the COP to consider, such as the preparation of a (potentially periodic) synthesis report on the adaptation efforts of developing countries, “based on the most recent adaptation communications, national adaptation plans, national communications, nationally determined contributions [...]”.<sup>26</sup> This could form an important input into the GST, but would also benefit from a transparent methodology based on comparable information in the Adaptation Communications.

### **Facilitate the mobilisation of support for adaptation in developing countries**

While the issue of mobilisation of support for adaptation in developing countries encompasses a number of issues which fall outside the scope of the negotiations on the guidelines for Adaptation Communications, the Communications can serve as a tool for developing countries to indicate their support needs, which may in turn help facilitate the mobilisation of support. The recommendations made by the Adaptation Committee and the LEG also touch upon issues in relation to enabling frameworks, such as adaptation policy frameworks and planning tools like NAPs, as a means to facilitate the mobilisation of support.<sup>27</sup>

The Paris Agreement recognises the relationship between global temperature rise and adaptation action (and associated means of implementation required). Information on support needs should therefore be based on, and informed by, temperature scenarios, while outlining needs associated with the implementation of plans for an upcoming commitment cycle, at the national or sectoral level. The needs communicated through the Adaptation Communications could be assessed against the indicative support to be provided by developed countries in the context of Article 9.5, to allow the GST to assess how delivered and pledged finance compares to communicated needs.

However, for the Adaptation Communications to play this role, Parties should agree on where and how support, both provided and received, should be reported. As mentioned earlier, there are divergent views on whether the Adaptation Communications should include information on the provision of support, or whether other reporting mechanisms are more suitable, such as the National Communications and Biennial Reports, whose guidelines could be amended in line with decision 9.CP/21.

### **Review the adequacy and effectiveness of adaptation and support**

In its work on tools and methodologies for reviewing the adequacy and effectiveness of adaptation and support, including through desk reviews of methodologies and syntheses of submissions, the Adaptation Committee and LEG have listed the following elements for consideration:<sup>28</sup>

- The ability and capacity to adapt to the adverse impacts of climate change has been increased.
- Climate resilience has been fostered/strengthened and vulnerability to climate change has been reduced.
- Contributions to sustainable development were made.
- Adaptation actions are adequate in the context of the temperature goal referred to in Article 2.

Specific challenges that have emerged in the work of the Adaptation Committee and LEG include the “differences in national circumstances of adaptation, the difficulties in setting adaptation baselines and targets, and the lack of common metrics for measuring progress on adaptation”.<sup>29</sup>

The Adaptation Communications and the outputs of the ETF are central for informing a discussion on collective progress toward achieving the GGA at the GST. They will provide information on actions undertaken and results achieved, and can help assess gaps in the capacity of countries to respond to adaptation challenges on the basis of predicted temperature rise.

To draw a comprehensive picture of collective progress on adaptation, a certain level of commonality in approaches used by Parties will be required, balanced with flexibility. The Adaptation Committee and LEG have recommended to the COP that the analytical and technical work on relevant methodologies and exchange of information should continue, including on metrics.<sup>30</sup> The more common ground that is found and applied by countries in their Adaptation Communications, the more it will be possible to arrive, over time, at a common understanding of what works and what does not. The coming years in advance of the first GST should be used to address these aspects.

The discussions at COP23 reflected the need for a clearer differentiation between the adequacy and effectiveness of adaptation and the adequacy and effectiveness of support. It was proposed that effectiveness should be understood in light of support provided by developed countries in response to the needs of developing countries.<sup>31</sup> Further discussions will continue in 2018.

## 2.9 Adaptation Registry

Article 7.12 of the Paris Agreement stipulates that “the adaptation communications referred to in paragraph 10 of this Article shall be recorded in a public registry maintained by the secretariat.” Parties have undertaken first steps to set up a registry through discussions under the Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI). The intersessional meeting in Bonn in May 2017 considered initial experiences with the current NDC registry operated by the UNFCCC secretariat, including security aspects of maintaining accounts online; the accessibility of the public registry; maintaining previously communicated NDCs; and providing user guidelines.<sup>32</sup>

Several Parties and Party Groups, including AILAC, the Like Minded Developing Countries group (LMDCs), AOSIS and the EU, made written submissions in advance of COP23 on aspects such as lessons learned from the current NDC interim registry; the functions of the adaptation registry; its structure and design elements; and ways to enhance security and user-friendliness.<sup>33</sup> The discussions at COP23 resulted in five options:

- Set up a new registry for Adaptation Communications.
- Designate a single existing registry/website (such as the NDC registry or NAP Central) to be the registry referred to in Article 7 paragraph 12.
- Set up a common registry for NDCs and Adaptation Communications.
- Set up a website with hyperlinks to various websites/registries where the Adaptation Communications can be found.
- Have no designated registry for Adaptation Communications. Instead, each Party may choose any

website maintained by the secretariat to house their Adaptation Communications.

At first glance, a registry may seem important mainly from a technical perspective. However, there are important political elements to consider. A separate registry for the Adaptation Communications will allow for greater visibility for adaptation and more focused treatment of its central aspects. Parties also hold different views on how, if at all, the adaptation registry should relate to the already existing NDC registry. But this relationship may be pertinent only for Adaptation Communications that are submitted as part of the NDCs. Otherwise, the elements of a registry for Adaptation Communications may be very different from a NDC registry.

The AOSIS has called for a clear separation between mitigation and adaptation registries (although there could be linkages), to allow for each to have their own timelines, guidance, etc.<sup>34</sup> Canada also argues in favour of a separate adaptation registry as it would contribute to “*maintaining the visibility and profile of global adaptation efforts; strengthening collaboration through the sharing of policies, programs and priorities, implementation and support needs; and sharing plans and actions related to adaptation, including at the local, sub-national and regional level in order to provide an accurate picture of adaptation efforts*”.<sup>35</sup> On the other hand, the LMDCs only make reference to an NDC registry and do not support a separate adaptation registry, although the group's submission notes that Adaptation Communications can also be communicated through other vehicles, which would be placed in other sections of the UNFCCC website.<sup>36</sup>

Once again, therefore, Parties did not reach agreement on the specifics of the registry at COP23,<sup>37</sup> and discussions will continue in 2018.

### 3. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Paris Agreement boosts the profile and political standing of adaptation, but this must translate to action on the ground. The Adaptation Communications can play an important role in making this happen, contributing to an “ambition mechanism” for adaptation, where planned action is implemented in a strategic manner. The Communications can raise the profile of adaptation, serve to increase global cooperation on adaptation, and provide valuable input to the GST.

The Paris Agreement is not very clear in communicating the purpose of the Adaptation Communications – partially because of the consensus-based nature of the Agreement which has to accommodate different views, but also because of the need for flexibility by countries with limited capacities. However, discussions at COP23 show that there is a high degree of convergence on the purpose of the Adaptation Communications – this will need to be translated into agreed negotiation outcomes in 2018.

Parties now face the challenge of agreeing the main content of the Adaptation Communications in a way that best suits the overall purpose. They must find the right balance between common, standard elements and consistent approaches, and the flexibility for Parties to define their own communications, which is clearly enshrined in the Paris Agreement. Otherwise they risk either being locked into too rigid an approach, or producing information that is so diverse that it fails to enhance action. The burden on countries will be higher if guidance is not clear, or if there is duplication in reporting requirements across the Convention and Agreement. Ways of achieving this balance could include distinguishing clearly between an overarching set of common elements and a flexible lower-order set of elements; making a clear distinction between opt-in/opt-out elements; and differentiating those requirements by type of vehicle (National Communications, NDC, NAPs etc.).

Moreover, the Adaptation Communications will evolve, and guidance can be adapted over time based on experience. Many Parties have highlighted the need for guidance that can serve multiple purposes, and be easily integrated with existing reporting tools. Towards this end, a simple overarching definition of the purpose of Adaptation Communications, along with elaborated guidelines on how they can be integrated in existing reporting requirements is recommended.

Effectively addressing the linkages to various negotiation streams will be decisive. The discussions under the ETF need to focus on the elements in Adaptation Communications that are needed to track progress in the implementation of action and support envisaged through the NDCs. National Communications and biennial reports can be key tools to submit (mostly) backward-looking information, with additional inputs on the support provided.

Synthesising such information will be important to inform progress towards the GGA, and as input to the GST. The stocktake will have to draw on information that is processed, synthesised and, where possible, aggregated in a timely manner. The outcomes of the GST can then inform both collective actions, as well as country-specific, forward-looking Adaptation Communications (irrespective of the vehicle chosen).

Parties should also consider whether and where a synchronisation of established cycles will facilitate their work on preparing and making use of Adaptation Communications – for instance, between the four-year cycles of the National Communications, and the five-year NDCs.

Progress on developing guidance for the Adaptation Communications will be critical over the next year. The negotiations should not be stalled or distracted by questions on whether mitigation negotiations are making similar progress. Political parity should be based on substance and action, not on negotiating time or speed. Parties must conclude work on the Adaptation Communications in time to allow for the operationalisation of the adaptation provisions of the Paris Agreement, and assist Parties in achieving the GGA.

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