

Advancing Adaptation Actions in the NDCs

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This knowledge brief outlines trends, gaps, and areas for strengthening the adaptation components of NDCs to speed implementation, which the World Resources Institute identified through an analysis of the first and updated NDCs of 86 countries. The analysis reveals that while the political commitments countries make through adaptation NDCs are becoming more detailed and specific, and therefore more likely to be implemented, there are still important gaps that must be addressed for countries to build greater resilience to climate change impacts.

Positive Trends

- **Improved alignment and integration with adaptation plans and policies.** Overall, the updated NDCs better align their adaptation components with national climate change policies and sectoral plans, as well as plans related to national and subnational development. Most notably, there is a significant integration with countries' ongoing or completed National Adaptation Plan (NAP) processes.
- **More details on sectoral priorities.** Updated adaptation components of NDCs include a broader range of adaptation priorities: water, nature-based solutions, and food and nutrition security are the most prioritized critical systems in the adaptation NDCs.
- **Many updated NDCs explicitly recognize different types and degrees of climate vulnerability** between groups within countries such as women, subsistence farmers and those living in poverty, highlighting distinct adaptation needs across social groups.

Common Gaps and Challenges

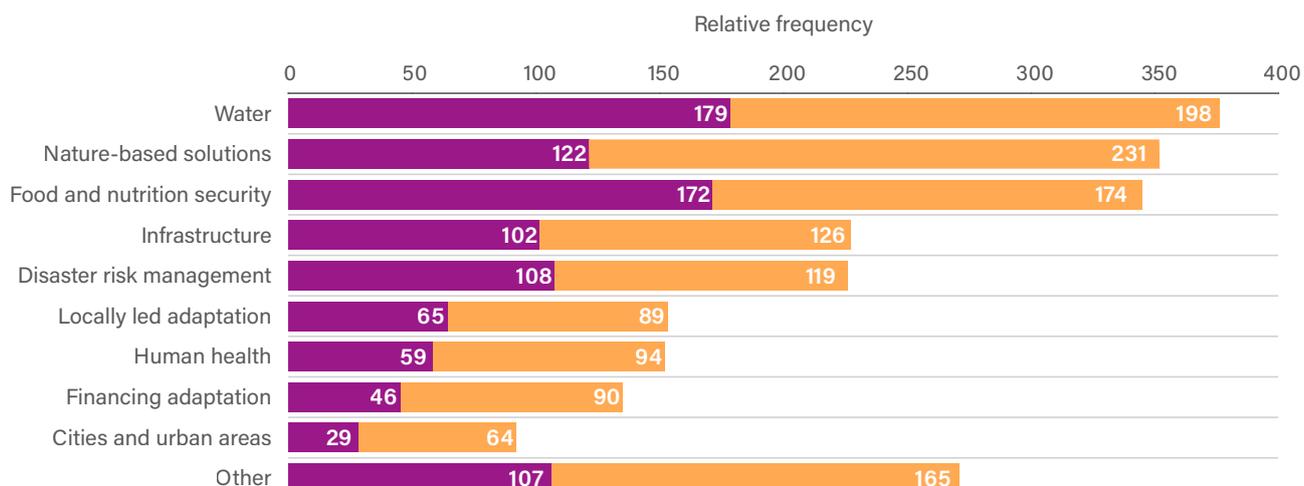
- **Lack of robust monitoring, evaluation, and learning frameworks for implementation.** Less than half of countries that included an adaptation component in their updated NDCs included information Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) for adaptation.
- **Financial flows and technical capacity** continue to be major barriers to implementation, slowing progress and creating reliance on external funding and assistance
- **Greater policy coherence across scales, mainstreaming and intra-governmental coordination are needed** for implementation of plans, including clear targets and timeframes.

STATE OF THE ADAPTATION NDCS: MAJOR TRENDS

A new working paper by the World Resources Institute (Dixit 2022) examines the first and updated NDCs of 86 countries that completed updated submissions by the end of June 2021, with the aim of understanding how the NDC adaptation components have changed between the first and second rounds and what this might mean for implementation of these high-level political commitments.

The analysis finds more detailed descriptions of the NDC development process in the updated submissions. Most countries describe lead institutions and stakeholders consulted for overall NDC development, but fewer include specific descriptions for the adaptation component. Many updated adaptation NDCs reference improved consultations, particularly with government agencies and the public, reflecting greater government ownership of the document.

Breakdown of Prioritized Adaptation Action in First and Updated NDCs



Dixit et al. (2022)

The updated NDCs increasingly align their adaptation components with other adaptation plans and policies. This includes references to national climate change policies, national adaptation plans (NAPs), sectoral plans, and national development plans. Alignment with country NAP processes is especially improved, making operationalizing of NDC adaptation priorities more feasible. The updated NDCs also include more references to international frameworks and conventions, particularly the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Countries are including more information on climate impacts, risk, and vulnerabilities in their updated NDCs. Information commonly referenced includes changes in temperature and rainfall patterns, impacts on sectors and systems from extreme events, and slow-onset events such as sea-level rise. Climate impact, risk, and vulnerability information in the updated NDCs is driven by the latest national communications and other recent assessments.

More countries describe a monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) approach for adaptation in their updated NDCs, but this number remains low. Less than half of countries with adaptation components describe an adaptation MEL approach, and even fewer provide MEL indicators or align with national MEL systems. Adaptation MEL remains voluntary and complex; many countries could benefit from improved guidance and tools for tracking implementation progress for adaptation.

Countries are including more adaptation priorities with improved sectoral coverage in the updated NDCs. Using the critical systems for adaptation in the Global Commission on Adaptation's Adapt Now report, adaptation priorities in the first and updated NDCs can be mapped for their sectoral coverage. The figure below presents the number of linkages adaptation priorities in the first and updated NDCs have to critical systems. The "other" category includes a variety of crosscutting issues, including capacity building, climate services, education, social development, tourism, and energy. The Adaptation Action Coalition addresses four of the Global Commission on Adaptation's critical systems by providing access to technical assistance to its members through its workstreams on 1) water, 2) health, 3) resilient infrastructure, and 4) locally led adaptation.

Water, nature-based solutions, and food and nutrition security are the sectors most often prioritized in the updated NDCs. Water was the most often prioritized sector across both submission rounds and saw a small increase from first to second submission. A report from the Global Alliance for Water Adaptation (AGWA), which leads the AAC's Water Workstream, similarly highlights the inherently cross-sectoral nature of water resources, supporting almost all aspects of the economy, natural environment, and society, and provides guiding principles and recommendations to support countries in incorporating water into national climate planning (AGWA; 2019). Food and nutrition security saw similar trends, with a minor increase in number of priorities between first and updated NDCs. Nature-based solutions stands out as the most prioritized system in the updated NDCs, with an 89% increase between submission rounds. This trend suggests countries increasingly view nature-based solutions as critical to adaptation.

Critical systems that were less frequently prioritized include locally led adaptation, human health, financing adaptation, and cities and urban areas. An analysis from the World Health Organization, which leads the AAC's Health Workstream, presents an operational framework for building climate resilient health systems and finds that current NDCs often lack the comprehensive range of actions needed to build climate resilient health systems, though many do refer to health-adaptation actions within their adaptation priorities (WHO 2020).

The updated NDCs increasingly represent local and indigenous concerns, with greater references to local knowledge and indigenous rights. Additionally, the updated NDCs include greater gender integration, with significantly more references to gender differences in adaptation needs, equitable participation and adaptation benefits, and collection of sex-disaggregated adaptation MEL data.

REMAINING GAPS

While progress has been made on making the adaptation components of NDCs more specific and better aligned with other relevant policies and plans, moving from commitments and plans to action and implementation presents challenges. Several gaps remain to be filled:

Prioritization: Prioritizing areas for adaptation interventions—a critical step towards implementation – remains a challenge for the many countries that are asking for assistance in this area (NDCP 2020). Clear and consistent methodology for prioritizing adaptation actions has yet to be developed.

Time frames, targets and indicators for implementation of NDC adaptation priorities across sectors: Of the 1,123 adaptation actions analyzed in the updated NDCs, only 45% included time frames for action and only 26% included measurable targets or indicators. Countries require additional support to clarify these targets and ensure that the detailed adaptation planning in the updated NDCs translates to effective implementation.

Policy Coherence: The updated NDCs include greater references to NAPs, SDGs, etc. suggesting improved alignment, but need to build on these synergies to accelerate adaptation, as the NDCs themselves are not implementation plans and need policy alignment to be operationalized. Along with this is the need for cohesive national frameworks to guide implementation and tracking of progress.

Horizontal and Vertical Integration and Locally Led Adaptation: Greater coordination is needed across sectors to harness synergies and enable better coordination between top-down and bottom-up adaptation processes. By engaging a diverse range of stakeholders during the development of adaptation components, countries can contribute to adaptation priorities that are more inclusive and mindful of reducing vulnerabilities (Dixit et al. 2022). An example of this is Colombia's adaptation NDC, the development of which included strong sectoral representation, coordination between national and subnational planning processes, and consultations with diverse groups (Dixit & O'Connor 2022).

Financing of Adaptation Action: Mobilizing both domestic and international finance for adaptation action is also a challenge. Adaptation financing lags behind mitigation financing despite the heightening need for adaptation interventions. Additionally, in both first and updated NDCs, the number of prioritized adaptation actions related to financing adaptation were relatively low (Dixit et al. 2022). However, all 86 countries included in WRI's NDC analysis reported that the total costs of prioritized actions had greatly increased between their first and second NDCs (Dixit et al. 2022). This poses a serious challenge to advancing adaptation action, as adequate implementation is dependent on steady streams of finance (Dixit et al. 2022; NDCP 2020).

Technical Assistance Needs: While initiatives like Climate Promise and the NDC Partnership (NDCP) coordinate technical support to address constraints in this area, there is still a need for scaled up technical assistance in many parts of the world. Many developing countries requested technical support for their NDCs due to capacity constraints (UNDP 2021); the AAC, NDCP, NAP-GN and other partners recognize that moving from analysis to action requires substantial technical assistance.

Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning: As discussed, less than half of the adaptation components of updated NDCs included information on MEL for adaptation. While a larger number of countries included information on MEL than in the first round of adaptation NDCs, there is a lack of a consistent methodological approach to this. The Global Goal on Adaptation offers an opportunity for real progress on this issue, and many promising approaches are being developed by countries to track progress of NDC implementation. For example, some NDCs discuss plans to connect a system for tracking NDCs with national adaptation MEL systems (Dixit et al. 2022).

Lack of Clear Implementation Arrangements: WRI's recent NDC analysis concludes that while substantial advances have been made in implementing adaptation projects and plans, additional progress is required to guarantee that adaptation priorities are fit for financing and implementation (Dixit et al. 2022). Articulation of timelines and identification of regulatory approvals and processes are needed to implement but are often lacking.

CONCLUSIONS

As highlighted in this brief, WRI's new analysis of the adaptation components of first and second rounds of NDCs found several key improvements that pave the way for turning these high-level commitments into on-the-ground implementation – but major gaps remain. The Adaptation Action Coalition plays a key role in bringing together national governments, global initiatives, grassroots stakeholders, international adaptation partner organizations and donor institutions to find and catalyze solutions. Its workstreams on water, health, locally led adaptation and infrastructure facilitate peer-to-peer learning and knowledge sharing, access to technical assistance, and vertical and horizontal integration of adaptation, to achieve a climate resilient world by 2030. Join us!

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