Alignment to Advance Climate-Resilient Development

OVERVIEW BRIEF 1: Introduction to Alignment

This is the first in a series of briefs focusing on alignment of country efforts under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Paris Agreement and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. This initial brief provides an introduction to the concept of alignment as it relates to these policy processes.

1. Introduction

Recent years have seen a number of global commitments aimed at putting human development on a more sustainable pathway (Bradley & Hammill, 2017; Hammill & Price-Kelly, 2017). There is broad agreement that climate change represents a threat to sustainable development (Denton et al., 2014); consequently, development efforts must be resilient to the impacts of climate change and related disaster risks in order to be sustainable.[1] This has been recognized in international agendas, including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which established the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); the Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC); and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR); all of which have drawn links between climate change adaptation, DRR and efforts to achieve sustainable development.

Key Messages

- Alignment of country-level policy processes under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Paris Agreement and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction can help to advance climate-resilient development.

- Alignment can increase coherence, efficiency and effectiveness in country policy processes for improved outcomes.

- At the global level, these agendas share objectives to strengthen resilience, build adaptive capacity and reduce vulnerability to climate change and disasters, creating a strong rationale for alignment.

- The approach to alignment will differ depending on the particular country context.

- Progress on alignment may follow a continuum from informal to systematic.

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[1] While recognizing that climate change mitigation is also fundamental to sustainable development, this brief is focused on alignment of climate change adaptation and resilience building.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon speaks to journalists on the entry into force of the Paris Agreement on climate change. UN Photo/Rick Bajornas

Within countries, a number of policy processes have been established under these global agendas, elaborating individual commitments, strategies and plans for meeting the objectives therein. These include strategies aimed at achieving the SDGs; National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) and Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement; and DRR strategies under the Sendai Framework. These represent key national policy processes that can advance climate-resilient development by facilitating systematic consideration of climate change in decision-making (United States Agency for International Development, 2014). Alignment of these different processes can increase coherence, efficiency and effectiveness towards development outcomes that are resilient and sustainable (Bouyé, Harmeling & Schulz, 2018; Hammill & Price-Kelly, 2016, 2017; UNFCCC, 2017).

There is increasing focus on the issue of alignment in international dialogues, including discussions under the UNFCCC (2017) and the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015a). Many countries recognize the value of aligning relevant policy processes; however, they struggle to understand what it looks like in practice and how it can be achieved. This introductory brief aims to increase understanding of the concept of alignment for climate-resilient development at the country level. The brief targets country-level teams engaged in planning and implementation of the different policy processes, as well as international actors supporting climate-resilient development efforts. It approaches the issue from the perspective of actors working to advance climate change adaptation and its integration in development processes, toward reduced vulnerability to climate change and strengthened resilience. It provides a definition of alignment and presents the rationale for aligning these particular policy processes, as well as a continuum of approaches to alignment. This is the first in a series of briefs on the topic, providing the conceptual basis for engaging governments and other stakeholders in dialogue on how to take alignment forward.

2. What is Alignment?

In this brief, alignment is defined as **a process of identifying synergies among policy processes with common objectives to increase coherence, efficiency and effectiveness for improved outcomes.**

Alignment can increase:

- **Coherence**, by facilitating analysis of shared objectives, co-benefits and tradeoffs between differing objectives, leading to more strategic investments and ensuring that efforts in one area do not undermine progress in another.
- **Efficiency**, by avoiding duplication of efforts and enabling smart use of resources, including finance and human resources.
- **Effectiveness**, by approaching climate-resilient development in an integrated way, leading to improved quality of planning, implementation, and measurement and evaluation processes for better results.[2]

The process of alignment necessitates intentional coordination among government actors across ministries and levels. Alignment demands flexibility, both to enable coordination and to ensure integration of new information and learning over time. It should therefore be accompanied by continuous review and monitoring. It is important to note that while alignment and mainstreaming are related to each other they differ in their objectives. Box 1 explores these differences in more detail.

Box 1: Alignment versus mainstreaming

A key way to advance climate-resilient development is through the integration, or mainstreaming, of climate change adaptation in plans, policies and strategies to achieve sustainable development. Mainstreaming involves the integration of climate change considerations in planning, budgeting, implementation and monitoring processes (United Nations Development Programme & United Nations Environment Programme, 2011). While related to alignment, it is not the same process. For example, mainstreaming climate change adaptation in a water resource management plan would involve analyzing current and future climate risks in the sector, identifying adaptation options that minimize the risks and incorporating those options in the sector plan. On the other hand, alignment involves looking at different policies or plans with common objectives and finding synergies. For example, implementation of the adaptation options for two different sectors, such as water and agriculture, may require that local actors have access to seasonal forecasts for decision making. An aligned approach could involve coordination of efforts to provide this service, to meet the needs for both agriculture and water resource management. While not a prerequisite for mainstreaming, alignment of different policy processes related to climate-resilient development can make the process more efficient and effective.
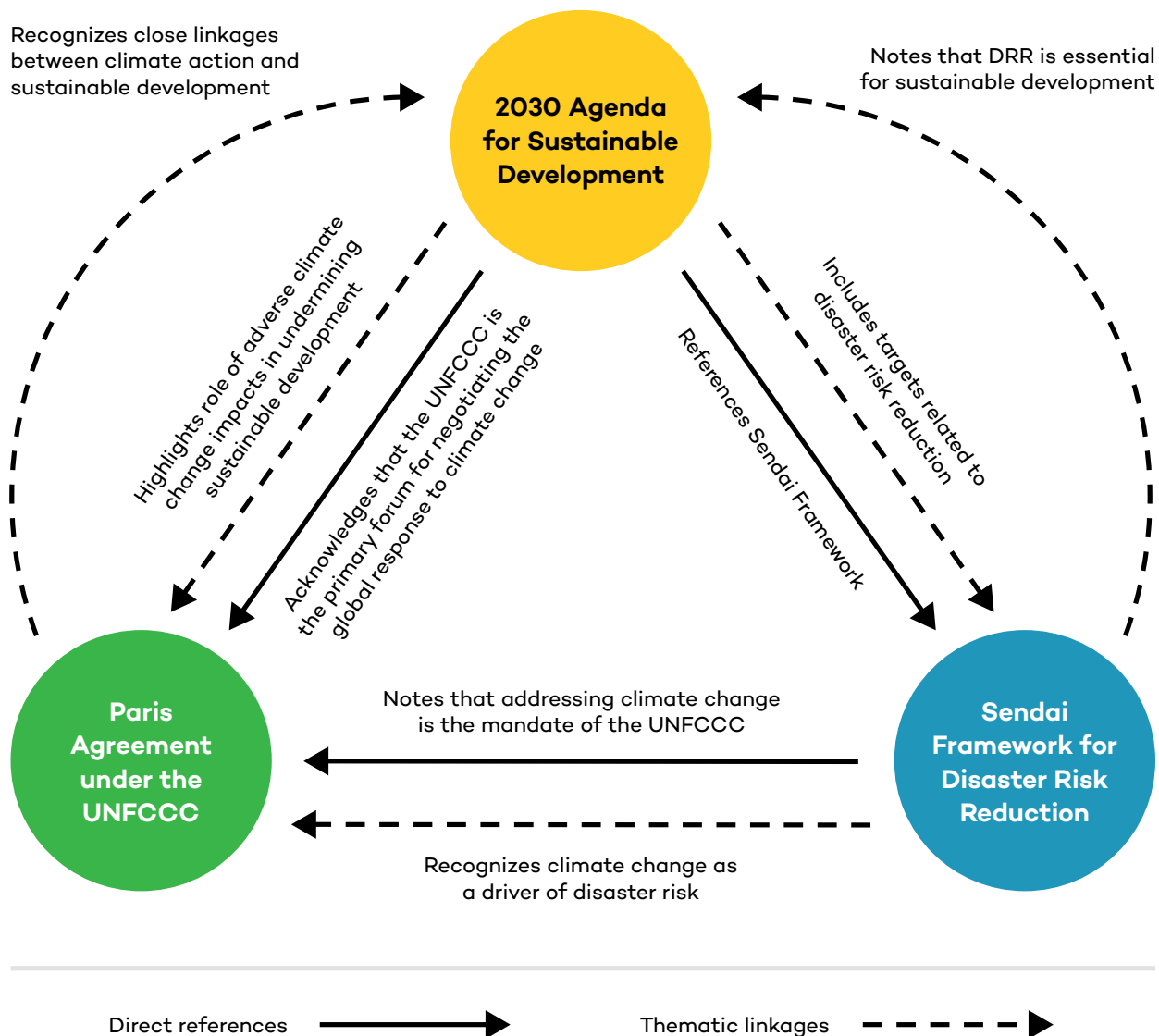
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[2] In a recent technical paper, the UNFCCC Secretariat highlighted these same benefits, but in relation to what they refer to as "partial, but robust" policy integration (UNFCCC, 2017, p.10).

3. The Case for Alignment to Advance Climate-Resilient Development

This brief focuses on alignment of country efforts under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Paris Agreement and the Sendai Framework for DRR. These agendas have been chosen based on their inter-connected objectives and common themes as a means of advancing climate-resilient development. Despite the chosen focus, the concept of alignment can be extended to other international relevant agendas with similarly overlapping objectives (e.g. the Global Framework for Climate Services, the Aichi Targets under the Convention on Biological Diversity and the New Urban Agenda etc.).

When considering alignment, it is helpful to better understand where the different policy processes connect. At the international level, the texts of these agendas make links to one another, both through direct references and through references to thematic linkages, as shown in Figure 1. This creates a foundation for creating functional linkages in country efforts to achieve these global agendas.

Figure 1. Connections in the texts of the global agendas

Recognizes close linkages between climate action and sustainable development

Notes that DRR is essential for sustainable development

2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Highlights role of adverse climate change impacts in undermining sustainable development

Acknowledges that the UNFCCC is the primary forum for negotiating the global response to climate change

Includes targets related to disaster risk reduction

References Sendai Framework

Paris Agreement under the UNFCCC

Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction

Notes that addressing climate change is the mandate of the UNFCCC

Recognizes climate change as a driver of disaster risk

Direct references ⟶   Thematic linkages ⇢

The table below provides an overview of the three agendas, highlighting the objectives related to climate-resilient development. Regardless of the level of effort on mitigation, the climate system will experience changes in the coming decades (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2014), and therefore adaptation will be required. Consequently, increased resilience and adaptive capacity, particularly for the most vulnerable groups as well as the importance of functioning ecosystems, are crucial to achieving development outcomes, such as food security and economic growth. There is clear convergence of these different agendas in relation to strengthening resilience, building adaptive capacity, and reducing vulnerability to climate change and disasters.

Table 1: Overview of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Paris Agreement and the Sendai Framework for DRR

	2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development	**Paris Agreement**	**Sendai Framework for DRR**
Purpose	Global agenda for action towards sustainable development, with 17 SDGs and associated targets	Agreement of the parties to the UNFCCC[a] on the global response to climate change, including both mitigation and adaptation	Global framework to guide multi-hazard management of disaster risk in development at all levels, as well as within and across sectors
Timeline	2015 – 2030	Adopted in 2015 and entered into force in November 2016; implementation phase technically begins in 2020, but the agreement also emphasizes the need for pre-2020 action	2015–2030
Objectives related to climate-resilient development	Climate action is the focus of goal 13 (SDG 13), which aims to combat climate change and its impacts, including by **strengthening resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards** and integrating climate change measures into national policies, strategies and planning. In addition, other goals address climate-sensitive sectors such as water, agriculture, cities and oceans.	Among other goals, the Paris Agreement aims to "increase the ability to adapt to the adverse impacts of climate change and foster climate resilience" (Article 2), specifically by "**enhancing adaptive capacity, strengthening resilience and reducing vulnerability to climate change**, with a view to contributing to sustainable development" (Article 7).	The overarching goal is to "prevent new and reduce existing disaster risk through...measures that prevent and **reduce hazard exposure and vulnerability to disaster**, increase preparedness for response and recovery, and thus **strengthen resilience**"[b] (p. 12).
Source(s)	United Nations, 2015	UNFCCC, 2015a, 2015b, 2018a	United Nations Office for Distaster Risk Reduction, 2015b

[a] As of the end of July 2018, 179 of 197 Parties to the Convention had ratified the Paris Agreement (UNFCCC, 2018a).

[b] Though the Sendai Framework for DRR is focused on disaster resilience, not on climate resilience, there is considerable overlap between these two concepts, and many DRR actions will support adaptation to changing risks associated with climate change.

4. Alignment at the Country Level

At the country level, national governments are working to operationalize the commitments under the 2030 Agenda, the Paris Agreement and the Sendai Framework for DRR. These are country-led, context-specific policy processes that elaborate how individual governments, in collaboration with civil society and private sector stakeholders, will contribute to achieving the global goals set out in the various agendas. These include:

- **Strategies for achieving the SDGs**, which identify country-specific targets and outline action plans for achieving them. Depending on the country context, these may involve standalone strategies or integration of the SDGs into national visions or development plans. This strategy process is generally led by either the central government leadership (such as the office of the president or prime minister), newly established inter-ministerial coordination mechanisms or the ministry responsible for planning and/or economic development.

- **Nationally Determined Contributions**, which communicate individual countries' contributions to meeting the goals of the Paris Agreement. Respective national targets set in NDCs are to be updated and submitted to the UNFCCC every five years, with the next iteration to be submitted before 2020 (UNFCCC, 2018b). Of the 169 countries that have submitted an NDC so far, 73 per cent have included information on adaptation and 41 per cent mention the NAP process (Adaptation Community, 2017). Responsibility for engagement with the UNFCCC, including development of NDCs, usually rests with the Ministry of Environment or the planning ministry. Many countries are also developing practical strategies for achieving the targets set out in NDCs. These include Low Emission Development Strategies for climate change mitigation and, in some countries, NAPs, as described below.

- **National Adaptation Plans**, which are national processes to identify medium- and long-term adaptation needs and put in place strategies to address these (UNFCCC, 2010). Although initially introduced in 2010, the process of formulating and implementing NAPs was highlighted in the Paris Agreement as a contribution towards the global goal on adaptation (UNFCCC, 2015a). These are guided by the *Technical Guidelines for the National Adaptation Plan Process* (UNFCCC, 2012) developed by the Least Developed Countries Expert Group (LEG) under the UNFCCC, as well as supplementary guidance developed by other actors. The NAP process also generally falls under the responsibility of the environment ministry; however, it is not necessarily coordinated by the same branch as the NDC. As noted above, some countries are making explicit linkages between NDCs and NAPs, with NDCs communicating commitments towards adaptation and NAP processes outlining how these commitments will be achieved (Hammill & Price-Kelly, 2016, 2017).

- **National DRR strategies**, which outline national strategies that include targets, indicators and time frames and are aligned with the recommendations of the Sendai Framework. Specifically, strategies should promote policy coherence and compliance notably with the SDGs and the Paris Agreement, and between national and local level. DRR strategies are most often led by the disaster risk management agency within the government. In many countries, if DRR and adaptation strategies exist, they are often not coherent and contribute to excessive demands on local actors (UNISDR, 2017). A guide is planned to support countries in developing national DRR strategies in line with the Sendai Framework (UNISDR, n.d.).

While processes to plan, finance and monitor NAPs, NDCs and SDGs are most often driven by national-level governments, the implementation stage generally implicates subnational actors. It is at the local level where the bulk of implementation will occur. This implies a strong role for subnational governments and local communities in realizing these goals (Dazé, Price-Kelly & Rass, 2016).

This alignment presents both challenges and opportunities. Subnational government authorities are often under-staffed, yet dealing with a wide range of agendas and priorities coming from higher levels of government, and not always in a coherent manner. Subnational actors may have limited capacity for development planning and implementation, with the integration of climate change considerations presenting an additional challenge. At the same time, as they are closer to communities, they are often better able to address sustainable development in an integrated way. They view the process of development not in terms of international agendas and commitments, but in terms of changes in the lives of women and men in their constituencies.
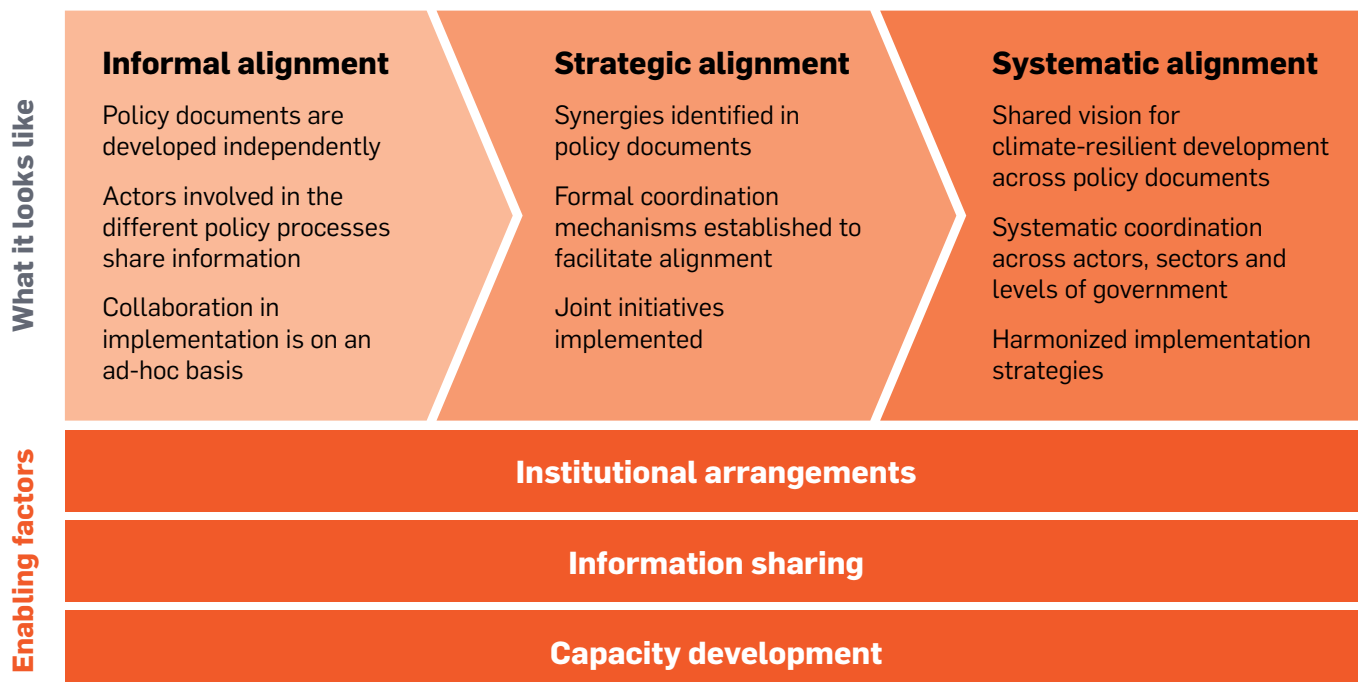
National-level actors must be cognizant of the additional burden that planning, implementing and monitoring processes such as NAPs, NDCs and SDGs can place on subnational actors. Alignment can reduce this burden, leading to harmonized guidance and capacity building, integrated planning mechanisms and streamlined processes for accessing funds for implementation. Subnational actors must be involved in discussions about alignment, as well as the design of systems and coordination mechanisms, to ensure that these reflect local realities and enable them to realize their potential contribution to climate-resilient development.

5. Approaches to Alignment

The preceding sections demonstrate the close linkages between these different agendas related to climate-resilient development, making it clear that the divide between the policy processes is political, not practical (Kelman, 2015). One of the challenges to alignment is that the different policy processes are most often led by different government ministries or departments, as noted in the previous section. This can create administrative and capacity barriers that may inhibit alignment efforts. While the alignment process can be initiated by any of the actors involved, it is most likely to be successful if the responsibility is taken by an actor with broader influence, which may be the central leadership, an inter-ministerial coordination mechanism or the ministry of planning and/or economic development.

The approach to alignment will differ depending on the particular country context. Figure 3 presents a continuum of progress on alignment, from informal collaboration, through strategic coordination, to systematic alignment. It also highlights the importance of institutional arrangements, capacity development and information sharing at all points on the continuum.

Figure 3. The alignment continuum

	Informal alignment	Strategic alignment	Systematic alignment
What it looks like	Policy documents are developed independently Actors involved in the different policy processes share information Collaboration in implementation is on an ad-hoc basis	Synergies identified in policy documents Formal coordination mechanisms established to facilitate alignment Joint initiatives implemented	Shared vision for climate-resilient development across policy documents Systematic coordination across actors, sectors and levels of government Harmonized implementation strategies
Enabling factors	Institutional arrangements		
	Information sharing		
	Capacity development		

Where countries are on this continuum will depend on a number of factors, including:

- **Political will**, in terms of the motivation and willingness of different actors to be flexible in their approaches and to invest time in coordination.
- **Power dynamics** within governments, recognizing that some ministries have a broader reach and stronger influence than others.
- The human, financial and technological **resources** available to enable alignment.
- Government **capacities**, including knowledge of climate-resilient development and skills to facilitate coordination across different actors, sectors and levels of government.
- The specific **focus and content** of the different policy processes (for example, whether an NDC incorporates information on adaptation or not will determine the potential for alignment with the other processes).
- The **legal status** of country-related commitments under global agreements (legally binding versus voluntary) may incentivize or disincentivize the level of engagement from different ministries and actors.

Inevitably, there will be trade-offs. These include trade-offs between investing in alignment and making progress on the individual policy processes. Alignment requires an investment of time and resources, which will likely provide returns in the form of improved outcomes. This relies on a shared commitment to alignment. However, the process of alignment may be perceived by some actors to be slowing down progress; a balance must be struck between coordinated actions and making progress, taking the particular country context into account. There may also be tradeoffs between different objectives related to climate-resilient development. In addition to synergies, alignment may reveal conflicting priorities among the

different policy processes, requiring negotiation and adjustment towards the best results. Navigating these tradeoffs represents a considerable challenge for countries seeking policy alignment. However, the potential benefits in terms of coherence, efficiency and effectiveness, and the potential improvements in outcomes related to climate-resilient development, make this a worthwhile investment of time and resources.

6. Next Steps

This brief has made the case for alignment of country efforts under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Paris Agreement and the Sendai Framework for DRR as a means of advancing climate-resilient development. While recognizing the barriers that countries face in undertaking aligned policy processes, the brief highlights the benefits of alignment in terms of increased coherence, efficiency and effectiveness. How countries tackle the challenge of alignment depends on many factors, and the approach must be tailored to the specific policy and institutional context. Most countries are in the early stages of considering alignment, creating a significant opportunity to identify common challenges and highlight emerging good practices.

The next brief in the series will focus on the practical dimensions of alignment and how it can be achieved.

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Financial support from Germany and the United States

Secretariat hosted by IISD

The Federal Government

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