



REPORT

Integrating Learning Into the National Adaptation Plan Process



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Authors

Julie Dekens and Blane Harvey

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The NAP Global Network was created in 2014 to support developing countries in advancing their NAP processes, and help accelerate adaptation efforts around the world. To achieve this, the Network facilitates South-South peer learning and exchange, supports national-level action on NAP formulation and implementation, and generates, synthesizes, and shares knowledge. The Network's members include individual participants from more than 155 countries involved in developing and implementing National Adaptation Plans. Financial support for the Network has been provided by Austria, Canada, Germany, Ireland, the United Kingdom and the United States. The Secretariat is hosted by the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD). For more information, visit www.napglobalnetwork.org.

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Contact Information

NAP Global Network Secretariat

c/o International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD)

111 Lombard Avenue, Suite 325

Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada R3B 0T4

Phone: +1 (204) 958-7700

Email: info@napglobalnetwork.org

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1

Why the Effectiveness of the NAP Process Depends on Deliberate Learning

Key Messages from this Report

- The effectiveness of National Adaptation Plan (NAP) processes depends on how well governments embed deliberate learning into the process.
- We identify three keys to enhancing learning in NAPs: (a) integrating learning at strategic moments across the different phases of the NAP process, (b) strengthening the enabling environment for learning in the NAP process, and (c) linking the learning process with learning outcome through monitoring and evaluation.
- By considering these entry points in their NAP documents, which are one of the key milestones of NAPs, countries can facilitate the integration of learning in subsequent phases of the process.

Adapting to the impacts of climate change (hereafter “adaptation”) is a continuous learning process. It involves a series of activities that range from regularly assessing climate risks to implementing solutions to adapt to changes that are in flux and evaluating if the interventions are reducing people’s and places’ exposure and vulnerability to climate change. Continuously learning from these activities is essential for effective adaptation. Learning can help us correct or optimize existing practices, reflect on the appropriateness of our approaches, or even revisit assumptions about the problems we are addressing (Armitage et al., 2008). We can thus avoid being locked into paths that leave us more vulnerable in a changing context or fail to address important drivers of vulnerability.

At the global policy level, efforts to address adaptation often make reference to the NAP process. Through the NAP process, countries put in place a collective and coordinated national response to dealing with climate change impacts by systematically and routinely integrating climate adaptation into decision making at all levels of governance (Hammill et al., 2019). In theory, the effectiveness of NAP processes, therefore, depends on how well governments embed *deliberate* learning into the process. However, in practice, NAP processes can be disconnected from learning.

Importantly, research shows that learning does not happen automatically; it needs to be built and nurtured (Dunlop & Radaelli, 2018). Despite a vast literature on types of learning, such as social learning, policy learning, and learning in environmental governance (Ensor & Harvey, 2015; Goyal & Howlett, 2018; Heikkila & Gerlak, forthcoming), we know little about how to promote sustained learning—deliberately and practically—in NAP processes.

The limited attention to learning in NAP processes does not mean that countries do not value learning. We all know that learning plays a crucial role in improving our practices. And yet, how to deliberately “do” learning remains elusive. At least two reasons may explain why learning does not appear at the centre of NAP processes. First, the concept of “learning” is vague, and countries lack a common definition of what learning is. Second, and related to the first point, it is easy to oversimplify how learning happens and assume that it will spontaneously follow from monitoring and evaluation (M&E), dialogues, or research and training activities. While individuals may learn unconsciously or experientially from their day-to-day practice, the NAP, as a collective process, requires that lessons and insights make their way from one person’s, one organization’s, or one sector’s experience out through the wider set of actors and systems that are tasked with planning, implementing, and monitoring and evaluating a NAP. This requires joint, deliberate, and coordinated efforts.

How, then, can countries ensure that NAP processes provide a space for learning and that this learning is documented and applied to improve adaptation outcomes?

In this analysis, we explore how countries are integrating learning into their NAP processes, and we identify opportunities for improvements. We aim to inform actors in government institutions—particularly the ministries responsible for coordinating the NAP process—and development partners supporting the NAP process to help them embed learning into national adaptation efforts. Recommendations from this analysis will help countries foster deliberate learning within their NAP processes in ways that can strengthen the effectiveness of both the process and its outcomes.

This report focuses on *how* countries can learn from the NAP process, i.e., the concrete actions they can take to acquire lessons. It does not focus on *what* countries learn during and after planning, implementing, and monitoring and evaluating their NAP process and its results (that is, the actual lessons learned from the NAP process).

2

Defining and Visualizing Learning in the NAP Process

We define learning in the context of the NAP process as the collective and deliberate process of acquiring, assessing, and disseminating new knowledge that results in changed or reinforced knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours related to climate adaptation (adapted from Gerlak & Heikkila, 2011).

This definition underscores that learning is both a process and an outcome. The process of learning, through dedicated activities involving acquiring, assessing, and sharing new knowledge, does not on its own constitute learning. The process needs to lead or contribute to some form of outcome, such as a change in knowledge, attitudes, or behaviours within the NAP process. This is all within a broader recognition that many factors—other than a learning process, such as a new government administration and a climate disaster—can contribute to a change in knowledge, attitudes, or behaviours (Heikkila & Gerlak, 2013). Thus, enhancing learning in the NAP process means determining how learning can be supported and what learning should result in.

Figure 1 visualizes learning in the NAP process. The NAP process consists of three overlapping phases of planning, implementation, and monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL), which are supported by a set of six enabling factors for effective NAP processes (NAP Global Network, 2023).

Learning in the NAP process refers to both a dedicated set of activities throughout the NAP process and a distinct phase, as we explain below. First, related to learning as an ongoing set of activities through the NAP process, all the activities conducted as part of the different phases of the NAP process (including those that support the enabling environment) present learning opportunities. Learning deliberately from these activities requires some specific actions, such as clarifying the learning objectives, identifying and partnering with knowledge brokers, and documenting, evaluating, and sharing lessons learned. Ideally, countries can clarify these elements as part of developing and implementing of MEL systems for national adaptation. Countries design and implement national-level MEL systems for adaptation to provide a structured approach to monitoring progress, evaluating results, and learning in order to ensure that adaptation actions are effectively achieving their intended impact (Beauchamp, 2023).

Second, related to a distinct learning phase, many countries have a policy or legal mandate to review their NAP process, often every 5 years, as a basis for revising or updating activities in the planning and implementation phases, such as updating a NAP document and a national

climate risk assessment with new information and priorities (Dekens, 2023). The review of the NAP process provides an opportunity to pause and examine past and current actions and conduct deeper reflections on the NAP process, typically looking at a few years of planning and implementation. These reflections can consider whether the country is doing the right things to address adaptation (i.e., are the issues and solutions identified still the right ones?) and is asking the right questions and addressing the correct problem (i.e., what is the right thing to do to achieve climate-resilient development?).

Figure 1. Visualizing learning in the NAP process



Source: NAP Global Network, 2023.

Learning in the NAP process is often discussed as part of M&E activities and labelled as MEL. Indeed, as for any other type of activity, learning from M&E activities does not automatically happen and requires a deliberate effort. Countries can do M&E without learning, and the inverse is also true; a country can learn about adaptation outside of M&E activities, for example, through research and trainings. As such, monitoring, evaluation, and learning are related but also distinct from each other (Simister, 2018):

- **Monitoring** involves the systematic and ongoing collection and analysis of data and information to track the progress of activities conducted as part of the NAP process.
- **Evaluation** is a punctual (rather than ongoing) assessment of the impacts of these activities. Its emphasis is on forming a judgment of performance to inform decision making.
- **Learning is a wider process that goes beyond M&E.** It supports the ongoing translation of the new knowledge that is generated from M&E and other activities conducted as part of the NAP process (such as knowledge exchange, research, and capacity strengthening and trainings), into changed or reinforced knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours related to climate adaptation.

3

How to Foster Deliberate Learning in the NAP Process

In this section, we discuss what it looks like to integrate deliberate learning into the NAP process based on a review of the literature on social and policy learning in the fields of climate change and environmental governance.

No consensus exists on how best to operationalize learning (Gonzales-Iwanciw et al., 2020). Nonetheless, the literature identifies some broad factors that seem to foster or inhibit learning within policy processes (Gerlak & Heikkila, 2019, 2011; Gonzales-Iwanciw et al., 2020; Heikkila & Gerlak, 2013, 2022, forthcoming; Newig et al., 2019).

Fostering deliberate learning in the NAP process involves the following steps: (a) integrating learning across the three broad and overlapping phases of the NAP process, (b) strengthening the enabling environment for learning across the different phases of the NAP process, and (c) linking the learning activities with the learning outcome through M&E.

3.1. Integrating Learning Across the Phases of the NAP Process

Governments need to clarify where and how in the NAP process they can foster deliberate learning. First, related to “where,” learning on national adaptation must be nurtured throughout all phases. Indeed, each phase of the NAP process involves activities related to acquiring, assessing, and disseminating new knowledge on national climate adaptation. For example, during the planning phase, countries can acquire new knowledge about climate risks and vulnerabilities by undertaking climate risk assessments. During the implementation phase, countries can acquire new knowledge about ways of managing projects and programs that address national adaptation priorities. During the MEL phase, countries can learn about the reasons for any delays in advancing their NAP process and why some adaptation measures have, or have not, reduced exposure or vulnerabilities to climate risks.

While learning can take place everywhere, it would be unrealistic to integrate learning into all activities of the NAP process. Instead, countries may want to identify some critical opportunities or “learning moments” at each phase of their NAP process. As noted earlier, the review of the NAP process during the “MEL phase” provides a space for deeper reflections on the NAP

process. But to facilitate “deeper” learning moments, “lighter”—but still critical—learning moments can also be clearly identified in the planning and implementation phases of the NAP process to reflect on whether countries are doing things right and to adjust activities as needed. Overall, critical learning moments will differ from one country to the next according to the status of the NAP process and the extent to which learning is already integrated into existing practices. Table 1 gives an overview of where in the NAP process countries can foster deliberate learning.

Table 1. Where in the NAP process countries can foster deliberate learning

NAP phases	Core NAP process activities	Examples of learning-oriented questions
Planning phase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiating the NAP process • Assessing national risks and vulnerabilities to climate change • Clarifying the vision and approach for integrating adaptation into development planning and budgeting • Prioritizing national adaptation solutions 	<p>Where and who will new knowledge on planning for the NAP process come from?</p> <p>What lessons can be drawn from the evidence and experience gathered and what are the key issues that the government need to address in their adaptation efforts?</p> <p>What are the learning objectives and how should learning be addressed in the NAP process?</p>
Implementation phase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managing projects and programs (from proposal development to securing financing and actual implementation) that are adaptation specific or that involve mainstreaming to address national adaptation priorities 	<p>Where and who will new knowledge on implementing the NAP process come from?</p> <p>What lessons can be drawn to improve the management of these projects and programs to ensure that they are delivered in a timely, coordinated, and efficient manner and prevent maladaptation?</p> <p>How will we act upon the learning as we progress on implementation?</p>

NAP phases	Core NAP process activities	Examples of learning-oriented questions
MEL phase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing and implementing a “MEL system” for national adaptation (e.g., setting objectives, managing data and information, and reporting on progress, results, and lessons learned) <i>[These activities typically occur throughout the planning and implementation phases]</i> • Deeper reviews and reflections on emerging trends, often over a longer timeframe, to inform the next cycle of the NAP process. <i>[These activities typically occur punctually during the review of the NAP process, looking at a few years of planning and implementation]</i> 	<p>Where and who will new knowledge on monitoring, evaluation, and learning for the NAP process come from?</p> <p>Do we know why activities related to the NAP process are on track (or not) and why they have the intended impact (or not), where, and for whom? What does it mean? For whom? What should be done about it?</p> <p>Have we encountered success and failure from the NAP? How do make sense of these? Do they mean we should act differently in the future? Do we need to review key assumptions for how to address adaptation to achieve climate-resilient development?</p>

Source: Authors.

Second, related to “how” (including how countries can answer the types of questions listed in the Table above), the literature indicates that learning is generally more likely to happen through social interactions with a formal focus on learning, such as through dedicated physical or temporal spaces, partnerships, or practices. In the context of NAPs, examples of formalized social interactions that foster deliberate learning include establishing a partnership with a knowledge brokering partner or intermediary organization to facilitate learning and exchange on national climate adaptation or establishing a MEL working group that is intended to engage in regular learning reviews. Informal dialogues on national adaptation can also foster learning under certain conditions (more information on this in the next point on the enabling environment). Dialogues focus on two-way communication processes. They can involve debates, knowledge exchanges, and deliberations organized in a variety of contexts, such as training, research, or networking activities conducted as part of the NAP process.

3.2. Strengthening the Enabling Environment for Learning in the NAP Process

As noted earlier, governments and other actors need to sustain learning in the NAP process, and the enabling factors that support the phases of the NAP process must also support learning throughout. Table 2 reviews the key enablers of learning in the NAP process based on past research.

Table 2. Enabling factors for enhancing learning in the NAP process

Enabling factors for an effective NAP process (NAP Global Network, 2023)	Examples of learning-oriented questions
 <p>Leadership: The active involvement of high-level political leaders and recognized “champions” who are committed to addressing adaptation.</p>	<p>Are political and opinion leaders who exert control over information and knowledge management committed to integrating deliberate learning in the NAP process?</p> <p>Is there dedicated oversight of a NAP learning agenda with demonstrated high-level commitment?</p> <p>Does the leadership for the NAP process support individuals and organizations to challenge their knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours related to adaptation?</p> <p>Does the leadership for the NAP process give individuals and organizations autonomy to innovate toward a clear and common goal?</p> <p>Are there “learning leaders” across different organizations and groups who can help make key connections, manage divergent interests, and navigate power differentials in the NAP process?</p>
 <p>Institutional arrangements: The rules, regulations, and associated organizational structures that enable coordination on adaptation across actors at all levels, as well as the systematic integration of adaptation into development processes.</p>	<p>Do institutional arrangements provide formal spaces for regular dialogues on the NAP process across scales and sectors?</p> <p>Are flexibility and review mechanisms in place to support actors involved in the NAP process to adapt their actions based on emerging evidence?</p>

Enabling factors for an effective NAP process (NAP Global Network, 2023)

Examples of learning-oriented questions



Engagement: Efforts that enable a range of diverse actors at all levels, including civil society organizations, the private sector, communities, the media, and academia, to participate in and influence decision making in the NAP process.

Do government staff have regular face-to-face dialogues that are open to a diverse range of actors to build engagement and trust and to promote shared learning on adaptation?

Are these regular dialogues bringing together a mix of actors with diverse interests and values on adaptation, going beyond the usual suspects? Do they employ a variety of approaches to fostering genuine and playful dialogues beyond workshops, such as games, field trips, and scenario building?

Are government staff engaged in partnerships dedicated to learning to introduce new approaches to convening and facilitating learning exchanges?

Has the ministry responsible for coordinating the NAP process identified dedicated roles (such as boundary organizations or independent advisory panels) to facilitate the translation and dissemination of information and knowledge among different actors?



Data, knowledge, and communications: The generation and use of (i) data and information, especially climate data; (ii) knowledge, including local knowledge and research; and (iii) key messages tailored to specific audiences to advance the NAP process.

Is there a clear strategy and infrastructure (e.g., software, database, platforms) in place for information and knowledge management to secure access to good (impartial, reliable, and transparent) information on adaptation, and the NAP process more specifically?

Do ministries, development partners, and other actors engaged in the NAP process have a clear understanding of the information needs of specific user groups to support information uptake and learning on national adaptation?

How and from where do decision-makers source the information that they use to learn about the NAP process?

Enabling factors for an effective NAP process (NAP Global Network, 2023)

Examples of learning-oriented questions



Skills and capacities: Investments in individuals and organizations at all levels to ensure they have the skills and capacities to enable effective and efficient NAP processes.

How does the government build individuals' and organizations' skills and capacities to support sustained, deliberate learning, such as facilitation and knowledge brokering skills, analytical skills, conflict management skills, and greater tolerance for error and failure?

Are key actors in the NAP process able to participate in learning activities to support "learning by doing"?

Are capacities available—internally or through external facilitators or learning partners—to develop and support social dynamics among NAP actors based on trust, mutual respect, shared or common language, and open communication?



Financing: The availability and accessibility of public and private financing for climate adaptation from domestic and international sources.

Is the government committed to allocating sustained financial resources to deliberate learning in the NAP process?

Are flexible financial mechanisms accessible for translating insights drawn from learning processes related to the NAP into new practices?

Sources: Based on Fisher, 2022; Gerlak et al., 2020; Gonzales-Iwanciw et al., 2020; Harvey et al., 2017, 2021; Heifetz et al., 2009; Heikkila & Gerlak, forthcoming, 2013; Kim et al., 2022; Russel et al., 2020.

These enablers work together to either foster or hinder learning in the NAP process, depending on the context. However, many other factors outside of those listed in Table 2 may influence learning. In particular, external factors that are beyond the direct sphere of influence of NAP actors, such as a political crisis, a disaster, and media attention, as well as cognitive factors (or how individuals in the NAP process filter information) can influence collective learning (Heikkila & Gerlak, 2023). For example, Wagner and Ylä-Anttila (2020) showed how large policy forums (such as the Irish climate change policy network) that bring diverse actors together do not result in more information exchange and learning because actors tend to interact with those in the network who already share their beliefs.

3.3. Linking Learning Activities With Learning Outcomes Through M&E

As noted earlier, learning occurs in the NAP process when a learning process generates concrete learning outcomes, typically changed or reinforced knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours related to adaptation. Thus, fostering learning in the NAP process should also include a focus on monitoring and evaluating (intended and unintended) changes in ideas and practices related to adaptation and the factors that contributed to these changes. In short, countries need to learn about learning and monitor and evaluate their learning activities. Governments typically capture information related to the results and impacts of the NAP process as part of their MEL systems.

We identify at least three ways of linking the learning process with the learning outcomes in the context of NAP processes, either through tracking the *future* effects of current learning practices or through evaluating past learning activities and changes in knowledge, attitudes, or behaviours:

1. **Clarify how the learning is going to be applied and for what purpose.** For example, a country develops a theory of change in the initial phase of its NAP process to anticipate how learning processes will be taken up in later stages of the NAP process.
2. **Establish dedicated MEL practices or bodies that have a mandate to track, report, analyze, and communicate learning outcomes.** For example, the ministry responsible for coordinating the NAP process develops terms of reference for a NAP working group on tracking lessons learned at specific points in the NAP process.
3. **Evaluate past learning activities and changes in knowledge, attitudes, or behaviours.** Countries can evaluate the impact of past learning activities on current adaptation practices. For example, a national committee convenes debriefing and stocktaking dialogues to capture lessons learned by NAP actors engaged in implementing the NAP process and how the lessons have contributed to changes in knowledge, attitudes, or behaviours related to adaptation. Countries can also document changes in knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours related to adaptation and assess the factors that contributed to these changes. For example, the ministry responsible for coordinating the NAP process documents change stories on adaptation every 5 years as part of MEL activities and the factors (e.g., learning process combined with other external factors such as climate disasters or political crisis) that led to the changes.

4

Trends in Embedding Learning in NAP Documents

This section draws upon a desk-based review of how governments have integrated learning considerations in NAP documents or plans. As of September 2023, 142 developing countries have initiated a NAP process (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change [UNFCCC], 2023). Among these countries, many have developed or are developing or revising a NAP document. These documents are one of the key milestones of NAP processes because they identify countries' national adaptation priorities. As of January 2024, about one third of developing countries had submitted one or more NAP documents to the [UNFCCC](#).

While NAP documents tend to be high level, they provide a useful entry point for countries to integrate deliberate learning early in the NAP process. Deliberate learning in the NAP process is also more likely to happen if learning is considered early in the planning phase of the NAP process. For example, countries can include an explicit commitment to integrate learning on national adaptation into their NAP documents.

In total, we reviewed 45 NAP documents submitted by countries to the UNFCCC's NAP Central platform as of August 2023. We used a structured questionnaire and thematic analysis of the documents to capture mentions of the following keywords and expressions linked to learning in a systematic manner: "learning," "lessons," "knowledge exchanges," "dialogues," "information and knowledge management," "training," "capacity building/development," "education," and "monitoring and evaluation."

We recognize the limitations of a document review. For example, some learning processes may exist that are not captured in plans, while, conversely, references to learning in plans may not lead to concrete action. Further analysis is, therefore, required beyond the review of NAP documents to understand how countries are embedding learning in the NAP process.

The review explored the following questions: How are countries referencing learning in their NAP documents? When NAP documents refer to learning, where and how in the NAP process do countries propose to put learning into action? What have countries identified as key enablers of learning? How do countries foresee learning activities contributing to adaptation outcomes?

4.1 Are Countries Referencing Learning in Their NAP Documents, and, If So, How?

Learning is not clearly positioned as a central objective of NAP processes. Eighty-nine percent of countries explicitly refer to “learning” in their NAP documents (40 out of 45 documents). There is a wide range of references to learning, from passing mentions to more detailed descriptions. Most countries have limited references to learning in their NAP documents, with one or few mentions, for example, of learning from monitoring and evaluation or learning from past studies and activities. References to learning in NAP documents are often limited to generic, high-level statements. Countries tend to present learning as a general principle of good practice. However, some countries—notably Bangladesh, Colombia, and Kiribati—go deeper. Colombia, for example, has a whole section of its NAP document on “summarizing lessons learned” as a commitment to implementing adaptation priorities. The section describes an approach for systematizing and synthesizing lessons learned on adaptation measures to inform the design and implementation of new measures.

Only a few countries present NAPs as an ongoing and deliberate learning process. When mentioned, few countries specify learning as a broad and continuous process that spans the different phases of the NAP process. Most countries instead refer to learning as the output of some specific interventions, typically a meeting or a report that discusses and summarizes the learning. Chile, Fiji, South Sudan, and Sierra Leone explicitly refer to climate adaptation, or their NAP, as a learning process—though there is a lack of explanation on what this means practically. For example, Fiji states that “institutional learning and coordination have been placed at the heart of the NAP process. This is to recognise adaptation as a ‘learning-by-doing’ process” (Government of the Republic of Fiji, 2018, p. 3). We found language referring to deliberate learning processes in a few NAP documents: Bangladesh’s, for example, refers to “proactive learning” (Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, 2022). Colombia and Ecuador mention the importance of systematizing lessons learned from the implementation of adaptation measures and the need to record lessons.

NAP documents include generic evidence of who needs to learn. Many countries explicitly refer to institutional (or collective) learning in their NAP documents (36 out of 45 documents). For example, Fiji recognizes the importance of institutional learning and mentions the lack of a platform for knowledge exchange as being a barrier to institutional learning and impeding adaptation effectiveness. Kenya also includes an explicit reference to learning across scales in the context of decentralization. Nearly a quarter of the documents reviewed (13 out of the 45 documents) explicitly refer to individual learning, especially in relation to education and training. These findings reflect that NAPs are a collective process but also that individual learning and capacity building can be strong contributing forces. With this said, NAP documents rarely specify who exactly is expected to learn (i.e., which institutions and actors of the NAP process) and on what issues related to climate adaptation specifically. In addition, from whom the learning is supposed to come is rarely mentioned. There are some exceptions; for example, Suriname

explicitly calls for learning from other countries, and Bangladesh indicates the need to encourage learning from “indigenous know-how” (Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, 2022, p. 184).

4.2 When NAP Documents Refer to Learning, Where and How in the NAP Process Do Countries Propose to Put Learning Into Action?

M&E is the primary process identified for generating and sharing learning on national climate adaptation. All countries mention the role of M&E in their NAP documents, and more than half (24 out of 45 documents) explicitly refer to learning from M&E. This trend is not surprising. The international development community has increasingly been recognizing the importance of integrating M&E and learning (MEL) to underscore that M&E does not automatically support learning. Most MEL systems focus more on reporting for accountability purposes at the expense of supporting deliberate learning toward improving the NAP process (Simister & Scholz, 2020). Saint Vincent defines learning-oriented M&E as a means to understand how change takes place (Government of St Vincent and the Grenadines, 2019, p. 84). In another example, Ecuador points to the crucial role of evaluation in generating learning (Ministerio del Ambiente, Agua y Transición Ecológica, 2023, p. 209):

The evaluation process is of vital importance, because it generates learning regarding all the phases and processes that are developed in government action (policies, plans, programs, projects, among others), which will allow, mainly, adequate accountability. ... and in turn, it will help generate evidence to provide feedback to management, improve planning and decision-making, and implement future interventions of a similar nature.

Countries also refer to learning from implementation, but less clearly. Eleven out of 45 NAP documents explicitly refer to learning from past and ongoing projects and programs on climate adaptation, but it is not always clear how exactly learning happens, or will happen, from project and program implementation. For example, Tonga’s second NAP document (Government of Tonga, 2018) includes a section on lessons learned from developing and implementing the first NAP document (though these are presented as a list of activities conducted under the first NAP rather than actual lessons learned). Colombia defines “a lesson learned” as a generalization based on an experience that has been evaluated,” noting that learning goes beyond experiencing because a lesson learned “involves reflecting on the experience within the context in which it was developed. The simple accumulation of facts, discoveries, or evaluations, by themselves do not deliver lessons” (pp. 58–60). Only one country, Kiribati, makes an explicit reference to failures as a source of learning.

Dialogues or knowledge exchanges are viewed as learning-oriented activities. Learning from dialogues and knowledge exchanges is mentioned in less than half of the documents reviewed (18 out of 45 documents). Togo and Burkina Faso identify “partnership” as a key

principle in their NAPs, and it is associated with the need for regular or permanent dialogues among actors. Countries such as Costa Rica, Niger, and Papua New Guinea identify specific adaptation priorities or outcomes linked to knowledge exchange. For example, one outcome of Costa Rica's NAP includes planning for “at least one biannual activity to exchange experiences and lessons learned on adaptation measures at subnational and sectoral levels (with academia, NGOs, communities and economic sectors)” (Dirección de Cambio Climático; Ministerio de Ambiente y Energía, 2022, p. 121).

4.3 What Have Countries Identified as Key Enablers of Learning?

Institutional arrangements feature predominantly but are not explicitly linked to learning in the NAP documents. Most NAP documents refer to the creation of various committees and working groups to facilitate coordination and the participation of key actors, but it is not always clear if these mechanisms are, or will be, used for dialogues to generate learning. Exceptions include countries such as Chile, Madagascar, Nepal, and Peru, which explicitly mention using these mechanisms for dialogues. Madagascar refers to a Platform of Secretaries General as a “space” for dialogue “to facilitate the fluidity of intersectoral exchanges, to avoid overlaps and to optimize the convergence of points of view on the integration of the climate change dimension specifically as it relates to climate adaptation” (Ministère de l'Environnement et du Développement Durable, 2021, p. 53). Nepal mentions that “cross-sectoral learning and experience sharing among all the stakeholders of the NAP (...) will be periodically organized using the existing or new coordination mechanisms” (p. 42).

Various countries have made information and knowledge management a key strategy for their NAP process. Almost all countries (44 out of 45 documents) refer to how data, information, and knowledge related to adaptation and the NAP process are or will be managed, often linked to the development of MEL systems. However, only two out of 45 documents reviewed explicitly refer to learning from information and knowledge management. Strategy and infrastructure for information and knowledge management have a critical role to play in ensuring that relevant and quality data and information are collected, and results and lessons are analyzed and discussed. For example, Kiribati recognizes the differences between and among women and men in terms of adaptation needs and capacities and the need to generate gender-disaggregated data. Countries also tend to refer to the development of communications strategies but often without including specific reference to using these as a basis for learning. A clear understanding of the information needs of specific user groups can support information uptake and learning (Harvey et al., 2021). Peru identifies various objectives and activities for its NAP communications strategy, including the creation of a virtual networking space for experts and the development of dialogues to share knowledge and experiences of success.

Countries do not explicitly refer to developing or strengthening skills and capacities to support deliberate learning in the NAP process. However, capacity development is a predominant theme in most countries' NAP documents (referenced in 40 out of 45), and capacity-building activities can be conducive to learning on national adaptation. Nine out of 45 documents explicitly refer to learning from education and capacity development. Various countries specifically refer to the importance of training. For example, Saint Vincent recognizes the limited technical capacity of staff in sector ministries for climate change adaptation and the need to support training (Government of St Vincent and the Grenadines, 2019). Suriname identifies training as “a key component for adaptation success in the long run” (Government of Suriname, 2019, p. 33).

Research is another prominent theme for most countries as one source of new knowledge on adaptation. Only two out of 45 documents explicitly refer to learning from research. Research is identified as a gap (e.g., Cameroon), as a strategic priority (e.g., Saint Lucia, Ethiopia, Bangladesh), or it is linked to different priority measures in key sectors (e.g., Sudan). Knowledge generation through research is expected to fill knowledge gaps (e.g., Bosnia and Herzegovina) and to support evidence-based decision making (e.g., Sierra Leone, Kuwait). South Sudan includes a reference to knowledge co-production, defined as “an approach to academic research in which the researchers work closely with decision-makers (usually within government) to identify policy-relevant research questions and to design research activities so that they provide useful, actionable information for policy and planning” (The Republic of South Sudan, 2021, p. 83).

4.4. How Do Countries Foresee Learning Activities Contributing to Learning/Adaptation Outcomes?

Countries provide limited information on how (or for what purpose) they are going to apply the learning. Learning activities in the NAP process are not an end goal in and of themselves. They need to generate changes in knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours to continuously improve the effectiveness of NAP processes to advance climate-resilient development. Some countries (e.g., Bangladesh, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, and Kiribati) explicitly link learning with adaptive management—although adaptive management is an approach and not an end goal and requires ongoing learning to adapt to the intrinsic uncertainties and changes of the world we live in. For example, Bangladesh refers to adaptation pathways to promote adaptive management in the context of uncertainties for climate-resilient development and further explains that “such pathways allow the implementation of multiple combinations of measures in a system, the observation of lessons, and adjustments to the adaptation trajectory at certain threshold points to accommodate learning and the unfolding uncertainties of climate change” (Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 2022, p. 79).

5

Eight Considerations for Countries to Enhance Learning in NAP Processes

This section identifies eight considerations for countries (and particularly the ministries responsible for coordinating the NAP process) interested in enhancing the integration of learning into their NAP documents, and NAPs more broadly, to improve the effectiveness of NAP processes.

1. **Don't take learning for granted.** Acknowledging that learning is central to your NAP process and that the success of your NAP depends on it will help ensure that learning does not become an afterthought. A useful first step to enhance learning in NAPs is to recognize that learning is an integral part—and a core objective—of NAP processes. NAPs are all about navigating complexity and uncertainty, and learning is essential for this to happen. The success of NAPs depends on their ability to support learning across multiple actors, sectors, and scales of governance to accelerate the implementation and scaling up of adaptation action in a way that promotes the alignment of activities and prevents maladaptation.
2. **Learn from and with the most marginalized groups.** Knowledge is “the substance of learning” (Newig et al. 2019, p. 3), and so putting learning at the centre of your NAP process is also asking the following questions at the same time: Whose knowledge is valued? Who sets the learning agenda? Who is invited to the dialogues and knowledge exchanges and under what conditions to allow engagement? How best to engage the most marginalized groups in the learning process? How do we make sure that the most marginalized groups benefit from the learning outcomes?
3. **Commit to integrating deliberate learning at strategic moments across the phases of your NAP process.** Countries should integrate learning across all phases of the NAP process—planning, implementation, and MEL. Learning should not be considered solely as the outcome of some isolated interventions conducted as part of the NAP process (e.g., a workshop or a mid-term review). It must be considered as a wider, ongoing process. As noted by Simister (2018, p. 2) on learning-focused M&E, “an M&E system may generate tentative findings which later need to be explored through more in-depth research. Or an M&E system might provide information and analyses that contributes to a dedicated conference around an issue.”

4. **Invest in strengthening the enabling environment for generating, sharing, and applying learning in your NAP process on a continuous basis.** Strengthening the enabling environment for learning is a fundamental need to advance adaptation. A robust understanding of the specific set of factors that influence learning in environmental governance in a particular context is still lacking (Gerlack & Heikkila, 2019). However, in general, supporting an enabling environment for learning means focusing on many of the same enablers for effective NAP processes related to leadership, institutional arrangements, engagement of key actors, data, knowledge, and technologies, as well as communications, skills and capacities, and financing.
5. **Provide clear direction on learning.** As Guijt (2010, p. 285) puts it: “‘learning’ requires direction,” meaning that countries need to be clear about the following: (a) what the learning interests and needs are, (b) who is expected to learn about what, for whom, and through what means, (c) what is the change expected from learning, and (d) how the learning will get translated into improved practices. Governments can set direction by defining a strategy for learning, ensuring leadership for that strategy, and communicating how this strategy implicates other actors involved in the NAP process. Setting clear direction on learning will help identify the best way(s) to nurture deliberate learning in your NAP process, i.e., which specific “learning moments” are most important or should be prioritized in your NAP process and why. Having dedicated leadership informing this direction setting will help ensure that learning processes remain visible and clearly defined, thus avoiding the risk that learning becomes “everywhere and nowhere at once.”
6. **Dare to prioritize learning as part of your M&E activities for national adaptation and make changes to reporting.** A deliberate focus on the learning dimension of M&E is important for achieving changes in practices because M&E activities do not automatically lead to learning. Countries need to implement learning-oriented M&E by deliberately integrating learning as part of their MEL system. They need to ask what has changed (as a result of the NAP process) and also explore “why it has happened (or changed), what it means [for whom], and what should be done about it” (Simister, 2018, p. 1). As countries increasingly develop NAP progress reports consolidating information gathered via MEL activities undertaken as part of their NAP process (Guerdat et al., 2023), ensuring that “deeper” learning questions are discussed and reflected in these reports would help respond to the urgency of learning.
7. **Seek dedicated resources from key partners, particularly knowledge brokers, at the international, regional, and national levels to embed learning in NAPs.** Information on how to practically integrate learning in NAP processes is limited or absent. In addition, building a culture of learning or a “learning mindset”—at both individual and collective levels—does not happen overnight: it takes time. Development partners, including finance providers, urgently need to provide adequate and sustained resources to address this issue. For example, the forthcoming revision of the Least Developed Countries Expert Group’s 2012 technical guidelines for the NAP process offers an opportunity for the international community to develop better guidance on learning.

8. **Be clear about the learning considerations that you can realistically reflect in your NAP document.** Recognizing that NAP documents are high level and only one of several key milestones of NAP processes, countries need to be realistic about the learning aspects that can be reflected in their NAP documents. Broadly, and at a minimum, NAP documents should consider the following three considerations:
- Make a clear commitment to deliberate learning (e.g., as an objective or key principle) and ensure that some adaptation priorities (and/or enablers) reflect this commitment.
 - Support the enabling environment for learning. During the development of the NAP document, governments may want to commission a review of their countries' enabling environment for learning, including a mapping of key "learning partners" and gaps that need to be filled.
 - Identify who within the government will be responsible for deliberate learning. The designated government ministry, agency, working group, or committee could also identify a "learning partner" responsible for supporting the government with the integration of learning into the NAP process.

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www.napglobalnetwork.org
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