

Advancing Adaptation Action

Enhancing alignment between national adaptation plans and nationally determined contributions



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Introduction

Under the Paris Agreement, countries are expected to submit new or updated nationally determined contributions (NDCs) in early 2025. This submission gives countries a chance to provide new information on their efforts to ramp up ambitions for reducing their greenhouse gas emissions and strengthening their resilience to climate change. In their NDCs, countries have the option of including an adaptation component to communicate their priorities, goals, and targets for climate change adaptation, as well as their implementation and support needs. According to the most recent United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) NDC synthesis report, since the latest NDC update, 81% of countries have included an adaptation component in their NDC (UNFCCC, 2024a). For developing countries that are currently formulating or implementing their national adaptation plans (NAPs), the 2025 NDC update presents a strategic opportunity to communicate their key adaptation priorities and strengthen the alignment between these two complementary processes.

As of October 21, 2024, 57 countries have submitted multisectoral NAP documents to the UNFCCC, and more than 140 developing countries have initiated the NAP process (UNFCCC, 2024b).¹ The NAP process was established in 2010 under the Cancun Agreements as a means for countries to mainstream adaptation into development planning

¹ NAP documents submitted to the UNFCCC can be accessed from NAP Central at <https://napcentral.org>. The list of NAPs on NAP Central includes sector-specific NAPs from Uruguay, which we have not included in this analysis because we are focusing on multisectoral NAP documents.

and budgeting and “identify and address their medium- and long-term priorities for adapting to climate change” (Hammill et al., 2019; Least Developed Countries Expert Group, 2012). The NAP process provides a key source of information on domestic adaptation planning and implementation to be considered in the NDC update. By including an adaptation component in their NDC and aligning it with the NAP process, countries can enhance the quality of the adaptation information in NDCs and global climate assessments while raising the profile of adaptation.

In anticipation of the 2025 NDC update, this briefing note synthesizes a review of countries that have submitted an NDC and a NAP and assesses the extent of alignment of the adaptation-related information presented in these documents. Targeted at national-level policy-makers—especially NAP teams who are responsible for a country’s national adaptation planning and implementation—this briefing note emphasizes the NDC update in 2025 as an important opportunity to further enhance alignment between the NAP process and NDC. It further provides practical steps, guiding questions, and examples of good practice from countries on how to realize these complementary linkages for more effective, inclusive adaptation. This builds on previous work undertaken by the NAP Global Network, which included a continuum for reviewing the degree of alignment between different policy processes, such as those related to NAPs and NDCs (Dazé et al., 2018; Terton et al., 2019).

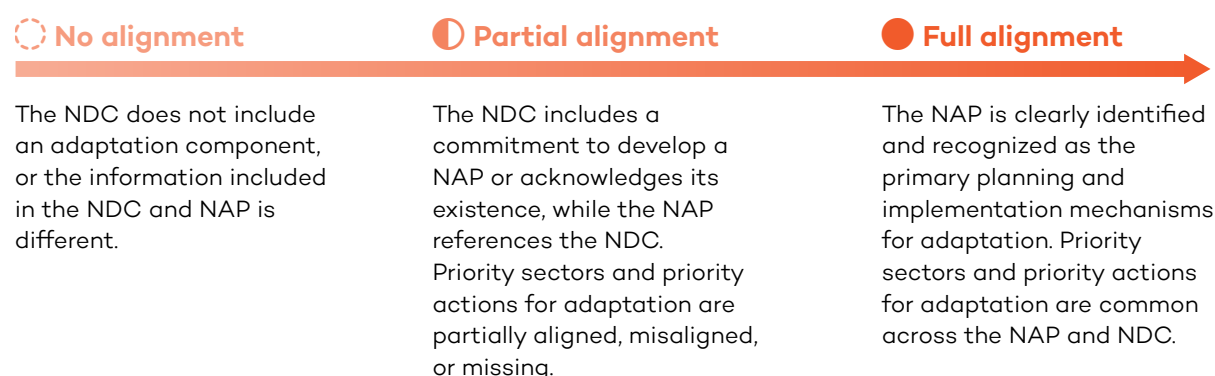
NAP–NDC Alignment as a Continuum

NDCs are the main vehicle for countries to communicate their pledges to combat climate change and outline their national-level policies and actions to help achieve the long-term goals of the Paris Agreement. In contrast, the NAP process is a domestic planning process that allows countries to mainstream adaptation into development planning and identify, address, and review their adaptation priorities while advancing the implementation of their adaptation measures. NDC and NAP processes are complementary, and there is a clear rationale for aligning the information presented in both documents. Drawing adaptation priorities and information from the NAP process to include in the NDC can facilitate communicating high-level goals to a broad range of actors and provide accountability for advancing the NAP process. Further, it can help leverage international support for finance, technology, and capacity development for adaptation.

Our review revealed that there is diversity in the type and extend of adaptation information included in countries’ NDCs. There is also diversity in how much it overlaps with the information in their NAPs (and vice versa). The following continuum (Figure 1) aims to capture the varying degrees of alignment of adaptation information among countries that have submitted an NAP and an NDC. We note that some countries may not include an adaptation component in their NDC and that the information in the two documents may differ: we characterize this as “no alignment.” The middle category, “partial alignment,” includes a broad range of scenarios, from including a commitment to develop a NAP in the NDC all the way to explicit linkages, where adaptation priorities and sectors are at least in part aligned. It may also include countries where the NAP and the NDC acknowledge each other, but the priority sectors and the adaptation priorities are either not mentioned or not in alignment. The right side of the continuum captures “full alignment,” where countries have explicitly framed

the NAP as the primary mechanism for planning and implementing adaptation, and priority sectors and adaptation priorities are common across the NAP and the NDC.

Figure 1. Alignment continuum for NAP and NDC processes



Source: Authors.

It should be noted that the continuum presents a simplified framework that aims to capture all the different scenarios of alignment and misalignment; however, there are many nuanced cases along the continuum.

Current Trends on NAP–NDC Alignment

Understanding how adaptation information in the NDC is aligned with the NAP will provide insights into countries' efforts to facilitate enhanced coordination and reduce duplication between these two complementary processes. The following findings are derived from a systematic review of NDCs and NAP documents from the 57 countries that have submitted multisectoral NAPs to the UNFCCC. They seek to enhance understanding of the extent to which the adaptation information included in both documents is aligned.

The review revealed the following trends:

1. Countries are increasingly emphasizing adaptation as an important element of the NDC, especially when they have established an NAP process. It appears that the NAP process greatly influences the articulation of adaptation priorities in the NDC. All countries that have submitted a NAP document to the UNFCCC have also included an adaptation component in their NDC. Among those 57 countries, 82% have included in their NDC a specific reference to the NAP process or a commitment to develop a NAP. At the same time, 87% of NAP documents make a direct link to the country's NDC. This finding echoes similar results reported in the UNFCCC synthesis report on NDCs: "In comparison with Parties' previous NDCs, more of the NDCs contain adaptation information. The adaptation components of the NDCs, where included, indicate an increased focus on national adaptation planning, in particular on the process to formulate and implement NAPs" (UNFCCC, 2024a, p. 8). For instance, Sudan's NDC includes adaptation goals for each vulnerable sector, along with main outputs, estimated cost and associated mitigation co-benefits (Republic of the Sudan, 2021).

Box 1. Good practice country example: Suriname

Suriname prepared its first NDC in 2015 (Republic of Suriname, 2015). The NDC references a number of adaptation interventions to build climate resilience by addressing hazards like sea level rise and extreme weather events. It also refers to the NAP, which outlined the climate-resilience measures the country was taking at the time. Following this, Suriname initiated its NAP process and completed its first NAP document in 2019 (Government of Suriname, 2019). The overall goals of the NAP are those defined by the Least Developed Countries Expert Group: to reduce the impacts of climate change through adaptation and resilience-building and to coherently integrate and mainstream the NAP into relevant new and existing policies, programs, activities, and development planning processes and strategies. The document covers strategic priorities, sectoral plans for “productive sectors” and “cross-foundation sectors,” accompanying strategic objectives and specific adaptation measures, a capacity-building plan, and financing modalities (Government of Suriname, 2019). Suriname submitted its updated second NDC in 2020 (Republic of Suriname, 2020), which identifies the NAP as the document that describes in detail how the adaptation commitments in the NDC will be achieved. The NDC reiterates the NAP’s overarching objectives as well as Suriname’s strategic adaptation priorities at the national level. Suriname demonstrates a good practice example of a consistent approach to communicating coherent information across the NDC and the NAP, using processes and outputs from one iteration to inform the next. The country treats the NDC as a document to communicate strategic priorities on adaptation, while the NAP acts as the comprehensive implementation strategy—providing details on actions, budgets, and monitoring and evaluation.

2. The varying timelines for the NDC and the NAP processes directly influence whether the respective process is referenced in either document. Countries were required to submit their first NDC in 2015, with updates every 5 years; meanwhile, the NAP process is ongoing and iterative, with the timeframe chosen by countries. Timelines for the NAP process should ideally align with domestic policy cycles, such as national development or sectoral planning processes. We observed that out of 26 countries that submitted their NAP documents before or in the same year as they submitted their NDC, 25 (96%) referenced the NAP in their NDC. For example, Kenya mentions that the contributions in its 2020 NDC submission were directly informed by its NAP for 2015–2030 and include an overview of its prioritized adaptation program (Ministry of Environment and Forestry, 2020). None of the countries that developed a NAP before an NDC fell under the “no alignment” category. Similarly, countries that developed or updated their NDC in the same year as they submitted their NAP displayed a higher degree of alignment in their adaptation information. In contrast, if the NAP was submitted after the NDC, only two-thirds of those NDCs included a reference to the NAP or a commitment to develop a NAP.

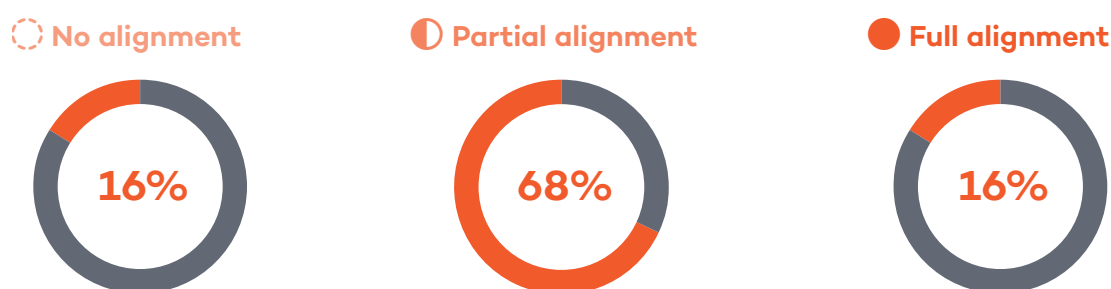
Box 2. Good practice country example: Chad

Chad submitted its first intended NDC in September 2015 (Republic of Chad, 2015), before the country initiated its NAP process in 2016. Chad's NAP is a strategic document that presents adaptation priorities and reinforces the long-term perspective and links between adaptation priorities, sustainable development needs, and the country's National Development Plan (Republic of Chad, 2021a). The country submitted its NAP to the UNFCCC in 2021 along with a revised NDC (Republic of Chad, 2021b) as part of the first round of the first 2020 NDC update process. The two documents were developed in close coordination, with the specific goal of updating the adaptation priorities in the NDC and considering joint implementation (Republic of Chad, 2021a, p. 64). The Ministry of Environment, Fisheries and Sustainable Development actively engaged with and coordinated various international organizations that supported Chad in the development of the NAP process and the NDC update; this emphasizes the importance of prioritizing actions, especially nature-based solutions, that link the two processes (NDC Partnership, 2022).

Chad's NAP states that its "first NAP will be implemented in conjunction with the updated NDC for the period 2021–2026. The focus will be on developing investment portfolios for the implementation of adaptation priorities that have mitigation benefits, such as nature-based solutions" (Republic of Chad, 2021a, p. 7). The revised NDC identifies the NAP as the main means of implementation and draws from it to communicate the country's adaptation vision and priorities. It also emphasizes the close collaboration between actors (in terms of adaptation actions) that took place during the development of the first NAP through national and regional consultations. Chad's decision to align its NAP process and its updated NDC will help promote coherence in implementation and information communicated to the international community—with the NDC providing the overall vision and the country's adaptation objectives and the NAP outlining how climate adaptation will be integrated throughout the national development planning process. This can help to accelerate and strengthen adaptation measures while creating a more streamlined use of limited financial resources for implementation. In addition, having a coherent set of needs and priorities across the two documents will help attract finance.

3. Very few countries are at either end of the continuum, but most are somewhere in the middle: 68% of countries fall into the category of "partial alignment." Among the rest, 16% fall into the category of "no alignment," and 16% fall into "full alignment" (Figure 2). The "partial alignment" category covers a wide range of different scenarios where different aspects of information included in the documents are aligned or misaligned. For instance, Brazil is included under partial alignment. The country developed its NAP in 2016, followed by its latest NDC in 2023; while the NDC includes an adaptation component and acknowledges the NAP, the adaptation priorities and sectors are not aligned (Ministry of Environment, 2016; Republic of Brazil, 2022). In comparison, Sudan falls within the same category, although its NAP and NDC exhibit closer alignment with respect to acknowledging the NAP in the NDC and in terms of the information related to adaptation sectors and priorities (Republic of the Sudan, 2016; Republic of the Sudan, 2021).

Figure 2. Percentage of countries in each category of the alignment continuum



Source: Authors.

4. There is great variation in how countries describe their adaptation priorities: across countries, between NAPs and NDCs, and in terms of what countries choose to include in their NDCs. Because there is flexibility and no dedicated guidance on how to include adaptation in the NDC, the information provided is of different types, depths, and scales. In some NDCs, adaptation priorities are called “strategic objectives” or “programs,” which may be a subset of broader adaptation priorities or goals in the NAP. Vice versa, NAPs may include “sectoral adaptation priorities,” “thematic strategies,” “cross-cutting actions,” or “programs of action,” which may or may not fall under high-level goals or long-term objectives for adaptation. The use of different words by countries to describe “adaptation priorities” made the comparison of those priorities in NAP and NDC documents challenging and created complexity in determining the coherence of the adaptation information across the two documents.

Aligning the NAP process with the NDC process can accelerate adaptation action by clearly and consistently articulating priorities and needs. The NAP process should inform possible future iterations of the NDC adaptation commitments as well as “how” these commitments are implemented. However, our review suggests that the feasibility and timing of pursuing full alignment will differ depending on the country context, the possibility of syncing the timelines, and what stage countries are at within a particular policy process.

Why Does the 2025 NDC Update Matter?

The 5-year update cycle of NDCs is the heartbeat of the Paris Agreement’s mechanism for ratcheting up ambition. Countries are obligated to “prepare, communicate and maintain” successive NDCs that reflect their “highest possible ambition” (UNFCCC, 2015, Arts. 4.2 & 4.3). Countries are required to submit NDCs every 5 years, starting in 2020, with each successive NDC representing a progression of ambition beyond their current NDC (UNFCCC, 2015, Arts. 4.3 & 4.9).

The regular NDC updates not only allow countries to “re-pledge” their commitments to addressing the climate crisis but also facilitate the periodic projection and assessment of the world’s collective progress toward a climate-resilient future, as the NDC is a source of information for the global stocktake process under the Paris Agreement. In 2023, the first global stocktake concluded that although progress has been made, the world is still not on

track to meet the long-term temperature goals. The 2025 NDC update is an opportunity for countries to urgently and rapidly ramp up their ambition—on both emissions reduction and climate change adaptation—to limit global temperature rise to 1.5 °C and to protect lives, livelihoods, and ecosystems in this changing climate (UNFCCC, 2023b).

Aligning the NAP and the NDC to create synergies between the two processes is important, especially in the context of the NDC update:

- Including an adaptation component in the NDC can serve to **raise the profile and visibility of adaptation and the NAP process, as well as amplifying the mitigation-adaptation nexus and fostering a holistic approach to climate action.** It can also help to maintain consistent and coherent messaging on adaptation across reporting and policy vehicles and ensure the two processes are complementary and mutually reinforcing (Terton et al., 2019).
- The NDC can provide an overarching vision and goals for the NAP process and establish targets for adaptation action, while the NAP process can **serve as an operational vehicle for how the adaptation commitments outlined in the NDC will be implemented and achieved** (Terton et al., 2019). The NAP may also provide an institutionalized and ongoing process that informs successive adaptation components of NDCs and provides relevant information on adaptation priorities, progress on implementation, and support needs.
- As part of the NDC information on co-benefits, the NAP process can provide details on co-benefits resulting from adaptation actions (UNFCCC, 2018). For example, nature-based solutions, including ecosystem-based adaptation, have the potential to contribute to both mitigation and adaptation, and they are widely integrated within countries' NAPs (Terton et al., 2024). Aligning the new or updated NDC with the NAP process may further **enhance the integration of nature-based solutions** and other adaptation solutions with multiple benefits in domestic climate actions.
- In the 2020 update, over one third of the NDCs mention loss and damage explicitly (Ryder & Calliari, 2021). At the same time, countries' NAP documents already include information and analysis relevant to understanding country-specific loss and damage, as well as specific actions to minimize and address that loss and damage (Qi et al., 2023). The new or updated NDC may leverage the NAP process to **highlight relevant information on loss and damage as well as outlining actions and related needs to avert, minimize, and address that loss and damage.**
- Lastly, the new or updated NDCs will be a source of information for the second global stocktake under the Paris Agreement. Their adaptation components will be used—alongside NAP documents, the adaptation chapter of the Biennial Transparency Reports, and standalone adaptation communications²—to **assess countries' collective progress toward achieving the Global Goal on Adaptation**, including the targets

² As of October 24, 2024, 17 developing countries have designated the adaptation chapter of their NDC as their adaptation communication: Angola, Argentina, Brazil, Burundi, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominica, Ecuador, Kenya, Lebanon, Mauritania, Mauritius, Panama, Paraguay, Somalia, and South Africa. See Ledwell et al. (2023) for information on adaptation communications and how the adaptation component of the NDC may serve as a vehicle for adaptation communications. See Qi & Beauchamp (2023) for information on the adaptation chapter of biennial transparency reports.

elaborated in the UAE Framework for Global Climate Resilience (UNFCCC, 2023). Aligning the new or updated NDC with the NAP process will facilitate coherent messaging on adaptation progress and needs, and help with the more accurate costing of adaptation actions and gaps in support.

Practical Steps for Enhancing NAP–NDC Alignment

As outlined above, in 2025, countries will have an opportunity to update and enhance the information and climate commitments outlined in their existing NDCs. Given that many countries have already included information on adaptation and that the NAP process is underway in more than 140 developing countries, this update is an important opportunity to strengthen the explicit relationship between the two processes. We recommend that NAP teams take four practical steps to engage more dynamically in enhancing alignment during the upcoming NDC update process.

Step 1. Use existing climate change coordination mechanisms and engage with relevant counterparts early in the NDC update process. Enhanced alignment requires collaboration among different actors involved in the NAP and NDC processes. Existing coordination mechanisms that are relevant to climate change can serve as a platform for discussing alignment and agreeing what information on adaptation should be included in the NDC. We recommend engaging with the team leading the NDC update as early in the process as possible—for example, in national preparatory workshops—to identify opportunities for alignment with the NAP process from the outset. These efforts can build momentum, stimulate communication, and enhance coordination on adaptation action nationally.

Questions for consideration on engaging with relevant counterparts in the upcoming NDC update:

- Which ministry and which department are responsible for leading the NDC update?
- What coordination mechanisms for climate change exist where the NDC update is being discussed? What is the role of the NAP team in these mechanisms?
- Who is responsible for ensuring the coherence and quality of the adaptation information to be included in the NDC?
- What is the process for the NDC update, and where are the opportunities for the NAP team to participate?
- How is information to inform the NDC update being collected and compiled, and what results and information from the NAP process are most relevant to that process?

Step 2. Draw on the NAP process to improve the quality of adaptation-related information in the next iteration of the NDC. The detailed information provided in the NAP should provide the basis for the overall adaptation goals, priorities, and targets included in the NDC while enabling the NDC to remain concise and focused on principles and high-level direction. This is key to ensuring consistency between the outward-looking commitments in the NDC and the domestic NAP process. The NDC update is an opportunity to improve the quality of the adaptation-related information by providing additional or new information and by demonstrating progress in implementing the NAP process.

For example, many countries submitted their NDC before they completed their NAP document. Based on progress made in the NAP process to date, NAP teams can include new information on adaptation costs to ensure their identified actions are implementation ready, or they can include new commitments based on the NAP process and its results; for example, enhanced action on equity and inclusion or operationalizing systems for monitoring, evaluation, and learning. This has the potential to mobilize greater finance for adaptation and to raise the profile and ownership of a country's adaptation ambition.

Questions for consideration on improving the quality of adaptation-related information in the NDC:

- What adaptation information was previously communicated in the NDC? What needs to be updated?
- What commitments were made in the previous NDC? Do these align with the NAP process?
- How does the NDC describe the adaptation planning process? Does it identify the NAP as the primary planning and implementation mechanism?
- Do the overall adaptation goals, priorities, and targets align with the NAP?
- Does the NDC include information about the impact of climate change on specific sectors/systems, and does it align with the NAP?
- What progress has been made on adaptation that should be reflected in the NDC?
- Will any mitigation actions in the NDC be affected by identified climate risks and impacts, according to analysis conducted through the NAP process?
- Have any new commitments, efforts, milestones, or investments been made or planned as a result of the NAP process, and do they contribute to enhanced adaptation ambition?
- Is new information about finances, investment needs, and costs available for prioritized adaptation measures?

Step 3. Use the learning from the NAP process to communicate adaptation-related barriers and needs in the NDC. To ensure that adaptation priorities are financed, it will be important to use the NDC to communicate capacity gaps that represent barriers to progress on adaptation in addition to finance and other resourcing needs. In other words, the NDC update represents an opportunity to make the international community aware of the country's financial and capacity needs. Beyond finance, there may be gaps in human resources, technologies, data, or knowledge. Along with this information, country teams may choose to identify other barriers and challenges that limit progress on implementing the adaptation actions.

Questions for consideration on communicating adaptation barriers and needs in the NDC:

- What (if any) financial needs for implementing identified adaptation priorities should be communicated in the NDC? Have these costs been estimated?
- What non-financial support needs (for example, technology transfer, data, or capacity strengthening) for adaptation should be communicated in the NDC?
- What barriers, challenges, and needs related to implementing adaptation should be communicated in the NDC?

Conclusion

The upcoming NDC update provides a key opportunity to draw from a country's NAP process to improve the coherence and quality of the adaptation information that is communicated to the international community. There is no need to overload NDCs with all the elements of adaptation that are needed for a comprehensive response. Instead, the new or updated NDCs should reflect a country's strategic priorities on adaptation, while the NAP process should elaborate on, implement, and track the adaptation commitments communicated in the NDC. Even when there is no final NAP document, the results and outputs of the NAP process can, and should, help communicate adaptation priorities and progress.

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