

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Paris Agreement, adopted in 2015, established the global goal on adaptation of enhancing adaptive capacity, strengthening resilience and reducing vulnerability to climate change, with a view to contributing to sustainable development and ensuring an adequate adaptation response in the context of the temperature goal. The 2017 Adaptation Gap Report, which is the third global Adaptation Gap Report by UN Environment – prepared in collaboration with the Global Centre of Excellence on Climate Adaptation – focuses on one of the key questions arising in the wake of the global goal: **What are the ways forward to assess progress towards the global goal on adaptation?**

The report explores key opportunities and challenges associated with assessing progress on adaptation at the global level. The report synthesizes information relevant for the ongoing work under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to prepare for the implementation of the Paris Agreement. In contrast to previous Adaptation Gap Reports, the 2017 report focuses on issues relating to frameworks, comprising concepts, methodologies and data, rather than on assessing a particular dimension of the adaptation gap. Future Adaptation Gap Reports will return to assessments of specific adaptation gaps.

An international team of experts, assessing the latest literature and practical experience within the topic area, has prepared the report. The process has been

overseen by a steering committee, and all chapters have undergone extensive external review.

The Paris Agreement’s global goal on adaptation provides a new starting point and impetus for assessing progress on adaptation at the global level, but additional information is required for assessing such progress.

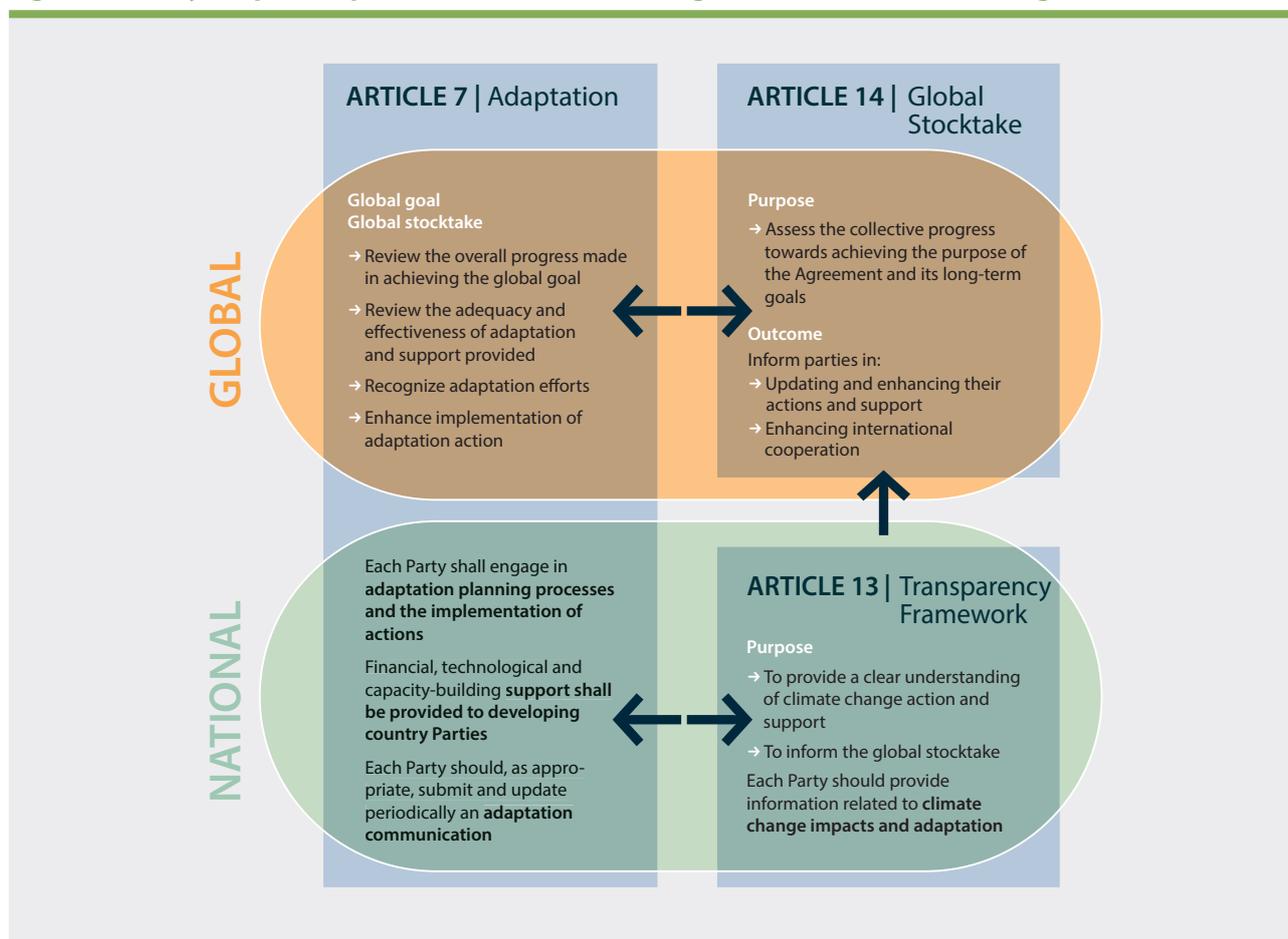
The global goal on adaptation provides a collective vision for the direction of global adaptation action. The goal is broad and multifaceted, and progress towards it will be reviewed in the context of the global stocktake specified in Article 14 of the Paris Agreement. The global stocktake will take place every five years starting in 2023, and include reviewing the overall progress in achieving the global goal on adaptation. In addition, the Paris Agreement contains two other provisions on adaptation that are important in the context of this report: the transparency framework and adaptation communications. These four provisions and the interlinkages between them are illustrated in Figure ES.1, further highlighting the global and national dimensions of the provisions.

An assessment of collective progress towards the global goal on adaptation implies that national adaptation reporting and national data are synthesized or aggregated in a transparent and systematic manner. A key question relates to the extent to which reporting should and can be comparable and standardized across countries. The existing communication



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Figure ES.1: Key adaptation provisions under the Paris Agreement and the interlinkages between them



vehicles, including the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), the National Adaptation Plan (NAP) processes and the National Communications, offer valuable information on past and planned adaptation actions and support needs. However, additional information is needed to allow for a comprehensive and comparable assessment.

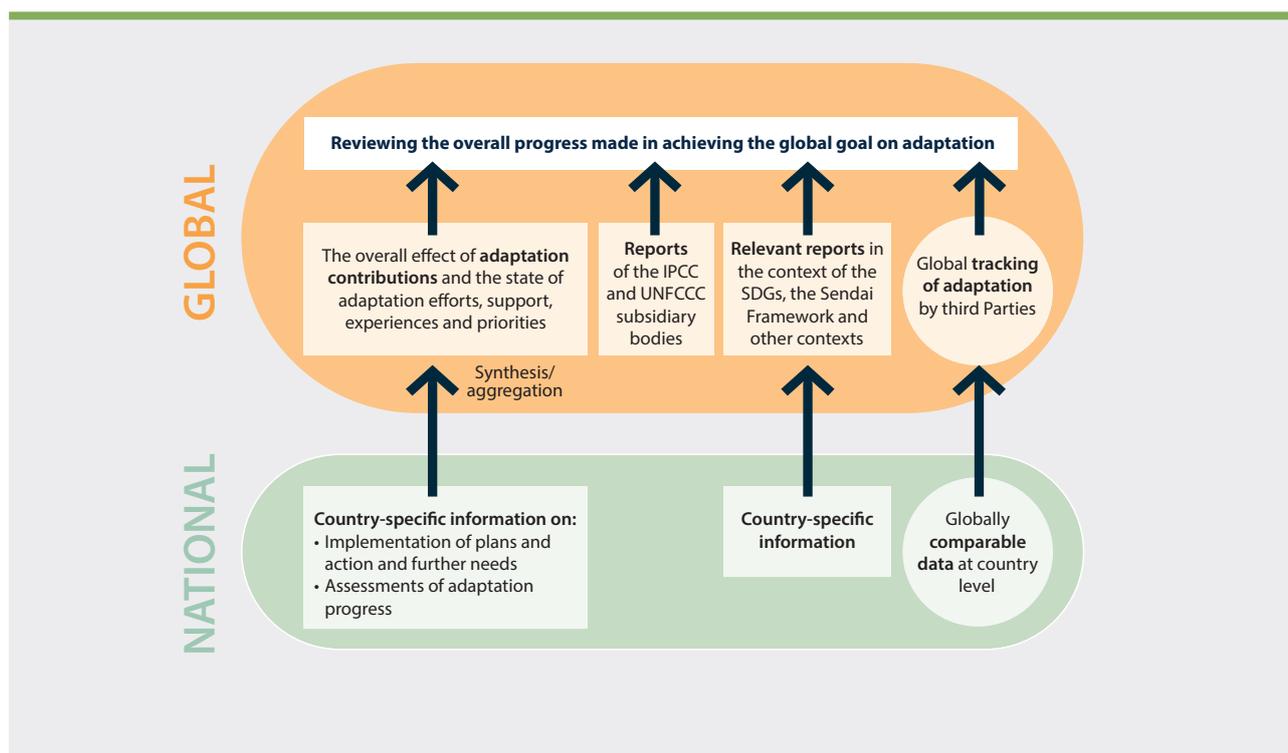
Globally comparable metrics that track progress towards the global goal on adaptation based on country-level information, while avoiding undue burden on countries, provide additional opportunities yet pose a considerable challenge.

Assessing global adaptation progress requires frameworks and metrics that are applicable across countries and sectors, and over time. The complexity of adaptation to climate change as a development and policy issue presents major challenges for a comprehensive assessment of adaptation progress globally, because it requires the development

and use of metrics that encompass enormous diversity. At the same time, metrics that can be aggregated and compared at higher levels do not lend themselves well to context specificity and meaningful progress on adaptation, particularly at national and sub-national levels. Decisions regarding which metrics to assess globally should take such trade-offs into account.

Opportunities to complement national adaptation communications with third-party information are currently explored. Such information can be derived from bodies such as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), frameworks developed by independent research and non-government organizations, and dovetailing with other global frameworks, such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction (Sendai Framework). Figure ES.2 outlines how various sources of information may feed into an assessment of the overall progress made in achieving the global goal on adaptation.

Figure ES.2: Reviewing the overall progress in achieving the global goal on adaptation based on multiple sources of information



Existing tools and frameworks for adaptation assessment, including for monitoring and evaluation (M&E), are generally geared towards project- to -country-level assessments and are typically not designed to be aggregated at global level.

Existing frameworks allow a distinction to be made between two generic approaches, focusing on either activities or results of adaptation policies and action:

- Assessing **activities** examines what countries are doing to address climate risk, and aims to measure inputs and processes related to adaptation. Metrics to assess levels and content of activities can capture whether actors are creating positive conditions and strong institutions or an effective and enabling environment for successful adaptation, but they do not allow for direct connections to be made to reduced vulnerability or enhanced resilience and adaptive capacity;
- Assessing **results** examines what has come out of the activities to enhance adaptation. In policy evaluation terms, this approach aims to measure the outputs, outcomes and impacts of adaptation activities. However, along the results chain from inputs to impacts, attribution of specific activities to adaptation outcomes becomes increasingly difficult, because external factors play ever greater roles. To assess results, it may therefore be more useful to focus on contribution, rather than attribution, and qualitative evidence to support quantitative indicators.

Similarly, it is possible to distinguish between two different types of metrics:

- **Descriptive metrics** do not provide value statements or normative assumptions, and generally use indicators of activities or results that can be more readily quantified. Descriptive metrics typically lend themselves more easily to repeated collection over time, which is of significance in relation to assessing progress towards the global goal on adaptation through the global stocktake;
- **Evaluative metrics** attempt to qualify adaptation activities and results to understand whether activities and results are adequate and effective. These questions cannot be answered directly through data collection and synthesis, because evaluative responses are influenced by individual and collective perceptions, values and expectations. Evaluative assessments of adaptation thus require the articulation of principles that will structure analysis and the recognition that the results of the assessment are not fully objective, but the outcome of a political and societal process.

Countries currently use both types of information and metrics in their national adaptation M&E systems. To assess progress towards the global goal on adaptation, it is necessary to ensure not only comparability of information across countries, but also to utilize metrics that can be collected repeatedly. Finally, there is a clear correlation between the depth of information an adaptation assessment can provide and the resources available.

National adaptation M&E systems can facilitate global knowledge sharing and transparency in addition to offering domestic benefits, such as better informed planning and decision-making.

More than 40 countries across all continents have implemented, or are in the process of developing, country-specific adaptation M&E systems. Reflecting the diversity in national circumstances, needs, policies and climate risks, existing M&E systems differ significantly in terms of purpose, scope, methodology, institutional arrangements and types of reporting. Most countries have taken several years to develop and implement their national adaptation M&E systems and have faced multiple challenges, including lack of capacity and limited availability of data. Some countries, in particular Least Developed Countries (LDCs), will likely require support to establish ongoing assessments of adaptation progress. Country experiences indicate that the development of a national adaptation M&E system should start by clarifying the purpose(s) of the system. Clarification of purpose is essential to inform the design of appropriate methodologies and metrics and to assess information and data needs. The same applies for assessing adaptation progress globally.

Current national M&E systems mainly focus on monitoring adaptation. Few countries have undertaken an evaluation of national adaptation progress.

Indicators are an essential part of most adaptation M&E systems. Existing national M&E systems tend to focus on monitoring adaptation through process and output

indicators. Some countries intentionally avoid standardized indicators to allow for context-specific flexibility.

While adaptation M&E systems differ across countries, they provide similar types of information, including advances in adaptation policies and governance, mainstreaming, implementation, and changes in vulnerabilities and risks over time. These data are highly relevant for country-level reporting to the UNFCCC.

There is limited evidence of the extent to which national M&E systems capture actions by non-state actors, including private sector, sub-national government and civil society. Such actions will be important to include in a review of adaptation progress, locally, nationally and globally.

There are currently no agreed-upon methods, indicators, metrics or frameworks designed for an assessment of progress towards the global goal on adaptation, yet existing frameworks can provide insights into opportunities for aggregating and synthesizing country-level progress.

A review of existing frameworks for adaptation indicates the following key desirable criteria for an adaptation assessment framework at global level: capacity to aggregate or synthesize country-level data, transparency, consideration of progress over time, avoiding undue burden on countries, inclusion of proxy indicators that are coherent with a collective understanding of meaningful adaptation, and sensitivity to national vulnerabilities, resources, and contexts. These are described in more detail in Table ES.1.

Table ES.1: An overview of desirable criteria for a global framework for assessing progress on adaptation

Criteria	Description	Associated articles in the Paris Agreement
1. Aggregable	Does the measure reflect a consistent definition of adaptation that is comparable at the national level, and is available for a comprehensive number of countries globally, such that data could be systematically aggregated (qualitatively or quantitatively)?	Article 14 focus on collective progress and Article 7 inclusion of overall progress. To some extent Article 7's consideration of adaptation recognition
2. Transparent	Are definitions, assumptions, and methods transparent and consistent between countries?	Article 13 requirement for a transparency framework to inform the global stocktake
3. Longitudinal	Can the measure be tracked over time to monitor and evaluate progress?	Article 7 and 14's focus on progress implies tracking over time
4. Feasible	For global synthesis/aggregation of national assessments submitted to UNFCCC: Does the measure avoid placing undue additional reporting burden on countries? For global tracking of adaptation using publically available data: Is the measure reasonably available or can it be collected for all countries?	Implicit
5. Coherent	Does the measure reflect a concept or construct that is coherent with a general understanding of what constitutes meaningful adaptation? Are assumptions underpinning the use of proxies empirically validated or theoretically sound?	Implicit in the Paris Agreement, particularly Articles 7, 13, and 14
6. Sensitive to national context	Is the measure sensitive to diverse national contexts (for example, different political, economic, and socio-cultural priorities and resources)? Does the measure avoid unjustified, poorly evidenced or generalized assumptions — implicit or explicit — regarding what is 'good', 'appropriate', or 'sufficient' adaptation?	Implicit but unspecified; degree of desired normativity unresolved



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Four existing frameworks include mechanisms for reporting of country-level data that to some extent is aggregable or consistent across countries, although the frameworks use different approaches to address the trade-offs in assessing adaptation. However, a comparison of these frameworks for two countries, Mozambique and Cambodia, where 3 of the 4 frameworks have been implemented, shows that results are highly inconsistent across frameworks, even for a single country, and there is evidence that results are inconsistently reported across countries.

A framework for assessing global adaptation progress would benefit from being sufficiently: a) broad to absorb the range of information; b) rigorous to capture essential metrics of change; and c) flexible to accommodate innovations in assessment approaches.

Guidelines for scoring criteria, peer review and broad stakeholder engagement can all improve the validity and ownership of assessment frameworks.

In summary, the 2017 Adaptation Gap Report points to the following key insights for informing an assessment of global progress on adaptation:

1. **Frameworks that are based on nationally determined proximity-to-target approaches have the greatest potential to respect a diversity of national contexts while facilitating global assessment of progress.** There are no one-size-fits-all metrics given the diversity of resources, vulnerabilities, and adaptive capacity.

2. **A transparent assessment of global progress is facilitated if national reporting of descriptive metrics (including activities and results) is clearly distinguished from evaluative metrics.** Evaluative metrics reported by nations are poorly suited to quantification of progress at the global level. While countries may choose to include evaluative metrics in national reporting, such metrics are best suited to qualitative synthesis when assessing global progress. Despite this, some evaluative metrics should probably be standardized to facilitate widespread adoption, including special consideration of the most vulnerable countries and vulnerable groups within countries, and principles such as equality and equity between genders and across other dimensions of vulnerability.
3. **Global review of adequacy and effectiveness, which typically involves the use of evaluative metrics, is unlikely to be achievable through standardized or quantifiable indicators alone.** Countries may assess how well they are achieving their targets based on their climate risk profile and other considerations. To increase transparency for global synthesis of progress, these assessments are well suited to qualitative reporting formats and peer or expert review rather than standardized indicator scoring. A review of frameworks from outside of the adaptation field highlights the role of peer review mechanisms in increasing reliability, validity, and consistency of adaptation reporting.
4. **A focus on the contribution made to a result rather than strict attribution** is emerging as a more useful concept to link national efforts with results. Attributing outcomes and impact to inputs and action directly is

unlikely to be reliable or comparable at the national level or consistent across countries. Instead, narratives can be used to assess contribution and qualitative evidence to support quantitative indicators.

5. **Longitudinal assessment of adaptation** progress over time is reflected relatively poorly in existing assessment frameworks, but will be critical in a global effort to review adaptation progress over time. This implies the use of indicators of change or progress in addition to static measures of effort.
6. **The SDGs and the Sendai Framework** offer considerable opportunities for alignment via shared indicators, joint implementation, capacity building, and creation of policy support.
7. **Third party information** can complement information provided by countries. The IPCC, other international bodies, and the broader research community can be called upon to provide information, and to help further develop methodologies suitable for global assessment of adaptation progress.

The Paris Agreement provides a new impetus for a global perspective on adaptation, which offers immense opportunities for advancing our understanding of adaptation and our ability to assess adaptation action and results across geographical locations and administrative scales, and over time. If efforts are combined and sufficient, it is possible not only to improve our ability to assess progress on adaptation, but to enhance such progress, and to ensure an adequate adaptation response in the context of the temperature goal of the Paris Agreement.