

Principles in Practice: Integrating Adaptation into Long-term Strategies



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All the interpretations and findings set forth in this expert perspective are those of the authors alone.

Integrating climate change adaptation into long-term planning is key to securing social and economic development, as the impacts of climate change are already affecting development outcomes.

We see this throughout the world as the number of floods and droughts increase in frequency and intensity, threatening livelihoods, human health, economies, and infrastructure. In order to adequately address these emerging climate risks, new ways of planning for the future are required. For example, coastal planning needs to anticipate the effects of sea level rise. Job-creation efforts in rural settings must take into account the impact of climate change on different parts of the value chain and on the resources that feed into the value chain. Take Cambodia and Niger, two countries expected to be impacted severely by climate change, where early steps have been taken to adapt.

In Cambodia, agricultural planning is addressing inconsistent water access through promoting private sector investment and the diffusion of green technologies such as solar water pumps and water-efficient irrigation. In Niger, new varieties of drought-resilient seeds have been disseminated along with training and investment to promote the diversification of livelihoods.

Moving forward, in addition to these important steps, countries need to transition from energy-intensive economic growth to low-carbon growth with climate resilience. If we do not address adaptation in development planning decisions in the context of low-carbon growth, the impact of investments will be lost.

It is clear that for many developing countries around the world, adaptation to climate change cannot happen effectively in isolation. It cannot and should not be separated from development. Choosing the appropriate policy instruments to

bring about this convergence is essential. Countries can integrate climate change adaptation through a menu of instruments including “long-term low greenhouse gas emission development strategies” (LTSs) that countries have been invited to communicate to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and national adaptation plans (NAPs). Ultimately, the choice of policy instrument should be grounded in principles that serve the context. The decision should not be whether to apply LTSs or NAPs but how these can be used to allow countries to meet their climate resilience goals most effectively. This needs to be matched by efforts to combine and sequence different sources and types of finance that fit the purpose.

Integrating adaptation into planning serves multiple ends. It offers a means to scale up local adaptation actions. It provides a platform to support and channel private-sector investments. It allows adaptation to be aligned with existing long-term national development plans along with international efforts such as the Sustainable Development Goals and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. Long-term low-carbon growth with resilience is the vision of most developing countries. This vision is best achieved through integration into long-term strategies.

Countries have already begun to take this step. In Nepal, Local Adaptation Plans of Action (LAPAs) have been developed to integrate climate change priorities into local planning across the country. These policies are now serving as a foundation for the development of Nepal’s National Adaptation Plan. In the Cook Islands, adaptation and disaster risk reduction have been integrated into the National Sustainable Development Plan (2016–20). Kenya has produced a National Adaptation Plan (2015–30) to support integration into national and county-level planning.

LTSs AND NAPs

Two instruments being used for climate planning internationally are LTSs and NAPs. LTSs provide a vision and prioritization for a low-carbon future in 2050. This duration, much longer than regular

plans permit, helps steer policymaking at a very high level. At the strategic level, these officially adopted strategies seek to align short-term policymaking with longer-term goals. NAPs are implementation-oriented and include appraising and prioritizing adaptation options. They determine the costs of various actions and lead to investments in adaptation on the ground. They tend to be aligned with the standard planning frameworks of countries, such as 5-year or 10-year plans. Given that there is still not enough knowledge of what adaptation options need to be scaled up, NAP implementation provides a means to gather evidence to feed into iterative planning cycles.

Many countries may choose to develop both policies, as the two plans can be complementary. Currently, most LTS documents are focused on emissions reduction. Thus far, only Benin, Canada, France, Germany, Mexico, and the United States have submitted long-term strategies. NAPs, in contrast, are focused on adaptation and generally do not link to mitigation and other cross-cutting issues. NAPs have been submitted by Brazil, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Kenya, Sri Lanka, Liberia, and Sudan, which gives the appearance that developed and developing countries are choosing different policies. In fact, however, developed countries have written long-term adaptation strategies under other names, and more developing countries likely will submit an LTS by the 2020 deadline. These documents, however, still represent the siloed approach separating mitigation and adaptation, which continues to haunt international climate discourse. At best, this has led to limited application at the country level; at worst, it leads to lost opportunities for maximizing synergies, avoiding duplication, and displacing limited staffing capacities in developing countries.

At the same time, it is important to note that LTSs and NAPs are not the only long-term policies that countries are developing. There are plans to reach the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 as well as operationalize the Sendai Framework. Countries are also writing joint long-term action plans for climate change and disaster risk reduction. Climate change is also being integrated into sector plans as well as climate change laws, policies, and strategies.

There is a clear need for international and national actors to consider how to integrate these multiple long-term policies into a coherent and country-specific framework.

CHOOSING PRINCIPLES RATHER THAN INSTRUMENTS

Ultimately, the choice of policy instrument should be grounded in principles. The question is not which instrument is best but rather which is most compatible with a country's existing systems and priorities, providing a means for it to achieve a low-carbon, climate-resilient future.

The primary principles to consider are the following:

- The policy process should be country-driven.
- The policy should take into account a long time frame, recognizing that climate impacts can be both slow-onset and extreme events
- The policy should be based on integrated scenario planning, including socioeconomic and climate change assessments.
- The policy should prioritize from among a suite of adaptation options.
- The policy should facilitate the implementation and scaling up of adaptation options.
- The policy should include financing strategies (e.g., seek to attract both grant and nongrant finance from both public and private sources).

The policy should include mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation, evidenced-based feedback, iterative learning, and the uptake and dissemination of knowledge and information.

The combination of these principles allows for an integrated examination of socioeconomic and climate impacts, a comprehensive evaluation of ways to address them, a mechanism for translating these plans into action, and a means to apply new evidence and learning to future planning. Climate

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change requires long-term planning because many impacts are expected to change over time. There are now sufficient models to understand these impacts over various time frames, allowing for more targeted planning. These scientific assessments, combined with socioeconomic models, can help identify potential future scenarios and improve decision making. Both LTSs and NAPs provide a means to take into account these long-term assessments.

Given limited resources, adaptation policy options also need to be prioritized. Various tools exist for this purpose, including structured approaches such as cost-benefit analysis, which is commonly used to support a variety of policy decisions. Other tools include qualitative, consensus-based approaches such as multicriteria analysis. This tool incorporates monetized and nonmonetized costs and applies values beyond cost efficiency. No matter which tool is used, however, it is important to understand the trade-offs between alternative policy options and how adaptation decisions may interact with existing low-carbon development policy priorities.

The choice of instrument should provide a framework for the implementation and scaling-up of adaptation options. Adaptation is occurring at the local scale around the world, but an enabling policy environment allows successful options to be made available to a wider community of constituents. Policies need to provide enough detail to signal to the various actors which actions are needed to bring about the desired change. A strong national policy supports the integration of adaptation into sectoral and local planning, leading to synergies across scales.

Adaptation can only be integrated into planning with the required budgetary resources and plans to catalyze finance toward climate action. Policies should consider what long-term public and private finance is available from international and domestic sources to support the chosen policy options. Appropriate policies must be in place to provide strong incentives to catalyze private finance toward investments that prove climate-resilient in the long run. Finally, monitoring and evaluation frameworks will need to be used to ensure that goals are met over the long term and that policies can be revised to address changing environmental, social, and economic contexts. LTSs and NAPs provide frameworks for iterative planning that allows lessons to be captured and translated into future policymaking.

Given these principles, each country may wish ask the following questions to guide its choice of policy instrument:

- Will this policy or strategy trigger a coordinated response on adaptation and mitigation and avoid siloed approaches and lost opportunities for capitalizing on synergies?
- Will this policy or strategy help trigger adaptation action at a scale sufficient to bring about action on the ground?
- Will this policy or strategy scale up investments for adaptation so that resources can be mobilized from the public sector? Where necessary, will it bring in private finance?

- Will this policy or strategy help us enhance the evidence base so that the strategy can be adjusted over time to secure long-term investments?

These principles and questions have come out of lessons learned through the UNDP's work with partners to support countries' development of long-term strategies that meet climate change and sustainable development goals. For example, the joint UNDP-UN Environment National Adaptation Plan Global Support Programme, financed by the Global Environmental Facility, has supported the development of NAPs in more than 30 countries, including conducting stakeholder consultation, stocktaking, NAP roadmap formulation, sectoral prioritization, and cost-benefit analysis. Another collaborative program, between the UNDP and the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, with the support of the German government, is focused on integrating agriculture into National Adaptation Plans in 11 countries, addressing the vulnerability of agricultural livelihoods and food security to climate impacts. The UNDP also is helping 41 countries access finance to develop their national adaptation plans. Without access to finance and technical assistance, these countries would likely never be able to produce NAPs.

Our work at the UNDP in assisting countries with climate action has demonstrated the various opportunities and challenges that long-term climate-sensitive planning presents. It has become clear that scaling up adaptation is no longer a choice, as impacts are already being felt. With the current concentration of greenhouse gas emissions, even if we reach zero carbon emissions today, the accumulated CO₂ emissions will necessitate scaling up adaptation action over the long term. Whichever way countries go, whether using LTSs, NAPs, adaptation strategies, or climate change action plans, it is important to consider these principles and whether they are being applied in practice.