

Policy pointers

Countries that signed the Paris Agreement but have not yet provided their new or updated nationally determined contribution (NDC) should do so by COP26 in November 2021. This collective commitment is required to achieve the global aim of limiting warming to 1.5°C.

For the good of the global effort, countries should follow guidance developed under the Paris Agreement which aims to promote NDC transparency, clarity and understanding. This will also help countries when they come to produce the progress reports required from 2024 onwards.

Countries planning to include adaptation priorities in their NDCs will benefit from following the adaptation communication guidelines, particularly the advice on highlighting barriers and financial gaps.

Guidance that supports the design and implementation of national monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems will help climate-vulnerable countries capture their adaptation progress and impacts (including indicators, metrics, and milestones). Donor support will also be key.

Updating NDCs: useful guidance to support greater ambition

Countries that signed the Paris Agreement on climate change must update their nationally determined contribution (NDC) every five years, reflecting increasing ambition. These national climate plans are the basis for the international climate regime under the Paris Agreement. The first NDCs, submitted in 2016, lacked the ambition required by the Paris goals. Many countries missed the 2020 deadline for new or updated NDCs showing greater drive, but are expected to submit these before COP26. We argue that countries preparing an NDC should consider guidance (agreed as part of the Paris Agreement 'rulebook') which will support clarity, transparency and understanding; inclusion of adaptation communications; and meeting the rules of the Enhanced Transparency Framework. Taken together, the guidance can foster structural consistency across NDCs, which will further enhance climate change aims. Examples from Malawi's NDC revision process illustrate consideration of the guidance in action.

Many countries missed the 2020 deadline to produce a new or updated NDC; but late submission in 2021 provides an opportunity. Countries can now consider new technical guidance which will support them in preparing and communicating an NDC, as well as tracking implementation. The guidance we discuss here comprises:

- The **modalities, procedures and guidelines (MPGs)** of the Enhanced Transparency Framework (ETF). Applying the MPGs will be mandatory from 2024 as countries report progress in implementing their NDC (with mitigation goals at the core).
- Information to facilitate **clarity, transparency and understanding (iCTU)**. While currently optional, countries must follow iCTU guidance when preparing their second NDC, expected by 2025.

- Guidance on **adaptation communication**. Optional, but any country planning to include adaptation goals in an NDC is encouraged to consider this (87% of NDCs submitted in the first round did include adaptation issues, making this widely relevant).

While not yet mandatory, countries are strongly encouraged to consider all the guidance. Benefits of a consistent, holistic approach to NDC preparation and reporting include enabling comparison and making it easier to aggregate collective impact on climate change. Universal application will increase transparency and raise the credibility of NDCs and the Paris Agreement as a whole. At national level, considering the guidance will facilitate efforts to track and report on implementation and achievement.

In this paper, we look at how the guidance can support NDC preparation regarding mitigation, then adaptation.

Considering the guidance will facilitate countries' efforts to track and report on implementation and achievement

LDCs rise to NDC challenge

In each successive NDC, countries must reflect their highest possible ambition to reduce emissions: current mitigation targets and plans

will not protect us from the worse effects of climate change.¹ The 46 least developed countries (LDCs) — responsible for just 6%² of total global emissions — are committed to the collective reduction effort; to submitting updated NDCs³ detailing

mitigation action; and to showing leadership in relation to the Paris goals.

Updating an NDC presents technical and financial challenges, especially for LDCs. But the process is also an opportunity, to take stock of domestic climate priorities and needs and to move into more sustainable development pathways. For countries with long-term decarbonisation strategies, the revision process is a chance to align NDC goals and implementation plans with long-term visions.⁴ Well-presented NDC mitigation targets may also help attract international finance for implementation.⁵

iCTU guidance: aiding consistency

The Paris Agreement rulebook declares clarity, transparency and understanding as essential to developing an effectively communicable NDC.⁶ These bywords also support consistency in NDC scope, format and approach, which is necessary to enable comparison and aggregate collective impact. Within LDC submissions, for example, mitigation goals vary from reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions to implementing policies and measures in different economic sectors.

Most NDCs were developed before the Paris rulebook adopted specific guidance, so alongside inconsistency, some lack sufficient information.

Box 1. Putting iCTU guidance into practice

In updating its NDC, Malawi has defined new economy-wide, quantified emission-reduction targets. Following the iCTU guidance, the revised NDC will:

- include a full description of the targets (including time frames, sectors and the GHGs they cover), plus detailed information on methodologies, assumptions and data sources
- consistently explain the key information used to prepare the emissions estimates in the 'business-as-usual' scenario (a hypothetical baseline scenario whereby no mitigation measures are taken; outcomes of NDC mitigation efforts are compared against it).

This more robust, revised NDC will support Malawi in implementing mitigation measures and in assessing progress.

Missing elements may include assumptions and methodologies used to define targets, gases and sectors, methods for constructing baselines or how land-use sector emissions will be accounted for. Considering iCTU guidance will help countries include sufficient and consistent information in their NDCs, enabling others to understand their national goals in the international context. The guidance requires that NDCs include:

1. Quantifiable information on the reference point
2. Time frames and/or periods for implementation
3. Scope and coverage
4. Planning processes
5. Assumptions and methodological approaches
6. How the NDC is fair and ambitious in light of national circumstances
7. How the NDC contributes towards achieving UNFCCC and Paris Agreement objectives.

These categories of information are instrumental for planning, communicating, implementing and reviewing national climate targets and to elevate the overall credibility of the Paris Agreement. Countries are strongly encouraged to consider the iCTU guidance before it becomes mandatory in 2025. Box 1 explains how Malawi is considering this guidance for the mitigation aspects within its current NDC review process.

Rules support better tracking

By the end of 2024, countries must report every two years on progress towards implementing and achieving NDC targets, in accordance with the ETF's MPGs. The MPGs include several elements of the iCTU guidance, so applying both and understanding how they overlap can help countries to meet NDC reporting requirements mandated by the ETF.

In drafting an NDC, countries can benefit from defining clear targets and selecting suitable indicators and methodologies to track progress, as this information will inform their ETF bi-annual reporting. This preparatory approach can help identify technical challenges and boost a country's institutional arrangements in response to the Paris Agreement's ambitious cycle of updating, implementing and reporting on NDCs. Box 2 describes how Malawi is considering both the iCTU guidance and MPG requirements.

Why include adaptation in an NDC?

Adaptation is vital work. Like other LDCs, Malawi is very vulnerable to climate change: rain-fed agriculture dominates, employing nearly 80%

of the population.⁷ While including adaptation within an NDC is currently optional, 98%⁸ of LDC submissions to date have done so,⁹ reflecting the importance of adaptation to lower income nations.

At national level, including adaptation in an NDC helps countries identify and prioritise adaptation needs, coordinate sub-national government entities, fill knowledge gaps and define areas needing external support. At international level, it raises the profile of adaptation, fosters recognition of national action, highlights specifically where support is needed, and helps developing countries raise that finance.¹⁰

Adaptation communications

The Paris Agreement rulebook¹¹ contains a set of adaptation-related elements which countries are encouraged to consider if they choose to include an adaptation communication in their NDC:¹²

- a. National circumstances, institutional arrangements and legal frameworks
- b. Impacts, risks and vulnerabilities
- c. National adaptation priorities, strategies, policies, plans, goals and actions
- d. Implementation and support needs of, and provision of support to, developing countries
- e. Implementation of adaptation actions and plans, including:
 - (i) Progress and results achieved
 - (ii) Adaptation efforts of developing countries
 - (iii) Cooperation on enhancing adaptation at the national, regional and international level, as appropriate
 - (iv) Barriers, challenges and gaps related to the implementation of adaptation
 - (v) Good practices, lessons learned and information-sharing
 - (vi) Monitoring and evaluation
- f. Adaptation actions and/or economic diversification plans, including those that result in mitigation co-benefits
- g. How adaptation actions contribute to other international frameworks and/or conventions
- h. Gender-responsive adaptation action and traditional knowledge, knowledge of Indigenous Peoples and local knowledge systems related to adaptation, where appropriate
- i. Any other information related to adaptation.

Countries are invited to provide information related to elements (a) to (d) and they may also include elements (e) to (i) as appropriate. Before this guidance, there was no advice on

Box 2. Seeking consistency in updating and reporting

Informed by the iCTU guidance and MPG requirements, Malawi's NDC revision process includes developing a cross-sectoral implementation plan and a monitoring, reporting and verification (MRV) framework.

The NDC **implementation plan** will identify and mainstream both mitigation and adaptation actions within national policies and sectoral strategies. It will include a roadmap with milestones, specific activities, identification of roles and responsibilities, a timeframe, funding needs for implementation and progress indicators.

The **MRV framework** will track NDC implementation progress and respond to all the ETF reporting elements (such as the national GHG inventory, adaptation and support received). For the GHG inventory component, Malawi is reviewing how it collects primary data and estimates emissions, allowing the country to assess where improvements are needed to meet new ETF inventory requirements and to identify gaps, challenges and needs.

Developing reporting systems while it updates its NDC is giving Malawi the opportunity to clearly link national policies and plans with international commitments, as well as ensure consistency in planning, implementation and reporting.

how to present adaptation information, which explains the wide variation in current NDC adaptation content (in terms of clarity, detail, aims, scope, timelines and measurability).¹³ Although adaptation is context specific, applying the adaptation communication guidance to new or updated NDCs could foster more consistent and complete information. Importantly, these elements create a space for countries with very limited adaptation resources to include information on barriers, challenges and gaps (e.iv) and support needs (d). Box 3 details how Malawi is considering adaptation-related guidance as it updates its NDC.

Tracking action, reporting gains

As well as communicating adaptation components in revised NDCs, countries can also report on the implementation of adaptation measures through the ETF. The MPGs include clear guidelines for optional reporting on adaptation progress, such as domestic monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems.

Countries need M&E systems to assess the impacts of adaptation. The resulting data can inform modifications to national adaptation

Box 3. Including enhanced adaptation components

Malawi addresses most of the adaptation communication elements within its revised NDC, including communicating institutional arrangements, policy and legal frameworks, and vulnerability and resilience status. The country has also commenced a comprehensive, four-step adaptation assessment — its revised NDC will also include enhanced adaptation components related to this. To enact the assessment, Malawi is developing indicators for each adaptation measure, and targets to track progress and inform future strategies and NDCs.

Box 4. Planning now for future improvement

Malawi's monitoring, reporting and verification (MRV) framework is one of the main outputs of its NDC revision process, designed to support implementation by tracking both mitigation and adaptation measures. The framework will consider ETF guidelines for adaptation in its design: these provide detailed requirements for M&E, which are central to the national MRV system.

National-level M&E of the implementation and effectiveness of adaptation will not be easy: this is the first time Malawi will report on adaptation; information is scattered across sectors; data is not easily accessed; and there is no dedicated mechanism for tracking adaptation measures. In applying its MRV framework, Malawi aims to extract useful lessons to improve the system over time and is keen to share its learning with others.

planning and future NDC revision, as well as provide the information necessary to periodically report on progress (as requested by the ETF). However, despite the significance of adaptation to many countries, most have yet to develop functional M&E systems with the methods and indicators able to track it; adaptation M&E is far more often seen at project level than national level.

The M&E of individual adaptation actions is challenging because many national M&E programs lack sustained resources and/or the capacity to operationalise them. Support from the international community will be vital in setting up and strengthening national adaptation tracking systems. There are also methodological challenges, including measuring the attribution of adaptation interventions, establishing baselines and setting targets.

These difficulties are accentuated when adaptation goals are articulated in generic terms, such as "promote water harvesting technologies

at all levels".¹⁴ Where aims are aspirational, qualitative and not time-bound, it is difficult to assess progress without the help of specific indicators. Moreover, in many cases, adaptation projects are implemented at the sub-national level and often overseen by donors with their own M&E methods, making it even more difficult to aggregate and understand nationwide progress.¹⁵ Despite the challenges, Malawi is working to embed adaptation M&E within its revised NDC (see Box 4) and hopes to share its learning with fellow LDCs and other countries with comparable adaptation goals and institutional challenges.

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ISBN 978-1-78431-908-3

This briefing has been produced with the generous support of Sida (Sweden).



Notes

¹ UNFCCC (2021) Nationally determined contributions under the Paris Agreement. Synthesis report by the secretariat. www.unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/cma2021_02E.pdf / ² Climate Watch (site accessed 2021) Data calculated for the year 2018 via www.climatewatchdata.org/ghg-emissions / ³ Least Developed Countries Group (2020) Least Developed Countries call for scaled up climate action and support despite hiatus from UN climate talks — LDC Climate Change (ldc-climate.org) / ⁴ Fransen, T, Northrop, E, Mogelgaard, K and Levin, K (2017) Enhancing NDCs by 2020: achieving the goals of the Paris Agreement. WRI, Washington DC. / ⁵ Nigeria (2017) Nigeria's intended nationally determined contribution. <https://www4.unfccc.int/sites/NDCStaging/pages/Party.aspx?party=NGA> / ⁶ UNFCCC (2018) Further guidance in relation to the mitigation section of decision 1/CP.21 www.unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/cma2018_03a01E.pdf / ⁷ Malawi (2020) Capacity building initiative for transparency. www.thegef.org/project/malawi-climate-transparency-framework / ⁸ Representing all 46 LDCs countries except Tuvalu. / ⁹ Or intended nationally determined contributions (INDCs) as some LDCs have not yet revised these documents. / ¹⁰ Aragon, I and Dorji, T (2018) COP24: LDCs' moment to shape an inclusive climate transparency framework. IIED, London. pubs.iied.org/17489iied / ¹¹ See Decision 9/CMA.1 in UNFCCC (2019) Report of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement on the third part of its first session, held in Katowice from 2 to 15 December 2018. Addendum. Part two: Action taken by the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement. pp.23-26 FCCC/PA/CMA/2018/3/Add.1 (unfccc.int) / ¹² NDCs are one vehicle to present an adaptation communication containing adaptation-related information for the country. Countries have the flexibility to present an adaptation communication as part of other documents such as national communications or national adaptation plans, or in a stand-alone adaptation communication document. / ¹³ Kato, T and Ellis, J (2016) Communicating progress in national and global adaptation to climate change. *OECD/IEA Climate Change Expert Group Papers*, No. 2016/01. OECD Publishing, Paris. <https://doi.org/10.1787/5jlww009v1hj-en> / ¹⁴ Malawi (2017) Malawi's intended nationally determined contribution (INDC), available at: <https://www4.unfccc.int/sites/NDCStaging/Pages/All.aspx> / ¹⁵ Dinshaw, A, Chaudhury, M and Peterson, G (2017) Insider: tracking adaptation at the national level: making progress in Fiji. WRI, Washington DC. www.wri.org/insights/insider-tracking-adaptation-national-level-making-progress-fiji

