
Adaptation Policy Frameworks
for Climate Change:
Developing Strategies,
Policies and Measures: Annexes

A

Glossary of Terms

This section provides definitions for many of the concepts and terms used in the Adaptation Policy Framework (APF). In most definitions, references are given to the applicable Technical Papers (TPs) where additional details concerning the particular topic can be found. Citations to the technical literature on a given topic are, in turn, found in the TPs themselves.

For some terms, such as vulnerability and risk, definitions vary between disciplines and contexts. In these cases, a broad definition is provided, together with alternative definitions. The motivation here is to provide flexibility to users to adapt the APF to their own applications.

Adaptation – is a process by which strategies to moderate, cope with, and take advantage of the consequences of climatic events are enhanced, developed, and implemented.

Adaptation baseline – also referred to as an adaptation *policy* baseline, this includes a description of adaptations to current climate that are already in place (e.g., existing risk mitigation policies and programmes) (TP6). See also *project baseline*.

Adaptation Policy Framework – is a structured process for developing adaptation strategies, policies, and measures to enhance and ensure human development in the face of climate change, including climate variability. The APF is designed to link climate change adaptation to sustainable development and other global environmental issues. It consists of five basic Components: scoping and designing an adaptation project, assessing current vulnerability, characterising future climate risks, developing an adaptation strategy, and continuing the adaptation process (Executive Summary and User's Guidebook).

Adaptive capacity – is the property of a system to adjust its characteristics or behaviour, in order to expand its coping range under existing climate variability, or future climate conditions (TP7). The expression of adaptive capacity as actions that lead to adaptation can serve to enhance a system's coping capacity and increase its coping range (TPs 4 and 5) thereby reducing its vulnerability to climate hazards (TP3). The adaptive capacity inherent in a system represents the set of resources available for adaptation, as well as the ability or capacity of that system to use these resources effectively in the pursuit of adaptation. It is possible to differentiate between adaptive potential, a theoretical upper boundary of responses based on global expertise and anticipated developments within the planning horizon of the assessment, and adaptive capacity that is constrained by existing information, technology and resources of the system under consideration.

Adaptive-capacity approach – is one of several conceptual and analytical approaches that can be applied to adaptation projects. With this approach, a project can investigate a system with respect to its current adaptive capacity, and assess ways in which adaptive capacity can be increased (or ways in which it may be lessened) so that the system is better able cope with climate variability and change (TP7). See also *adaptation project approaches*.

Adaptation capacity baseline – includes a description of the current capacity within a priority system to cope with and adapt to climate variability (TP7). See also *project baseline*.

Adaptation project approaches – are conceptual and analytical approaches that can be selected to respond to the unique needs of adaptation projects (TP1). Four major approaches that can be applied to adaptation projects include the hazards-based approach, the vulnerability-based approach, the adaptive-capacity approach and the policy-based approach. See also the individual project approach definitions.

Baselines – used in two distinct ways in the APF, the term “baseline” can refer to either a *project baseline* (definitions) or a future baseline or *reference scenario* (definition). The project baseline describes where the project is starting from (for use in, e.g., subsequent monitoring and evaluation), while the reference scenario provides a plausible picture of a future in the priority system *without* adaptation, to allow for comparison of different adaptation strategies, policies and measures.

Climate change – refers to any change in climate over time, whether due to natural variability or because of human activity (IPCC, 2001). See also *climate variability*.

Climate change vulnerability – is the degree to which a system is susceptible to, or unable to cope with the adverse effects of climate change, including climate variability and extremes (IPCC, 2001) (TPs 4 and 5). See also *vulnerability*.

Climate risk baseline – includes a description of the current climate risk within the priority system (i.e., the probability of a climate hazard combined with the system's current vulnerability) (TPs 4 and 5). See also *project baseline*.

Climate variability – refers to variations in the mean state and other statistics (such as standard deviations, the occurrence of extremes, etc.) of the climate on all temporal and spatial scales beyond that of individual weather events. Variability may result from natural internal processes within the climate system (internal variability) or to variations in natural or anthropogenic external forcing (external variability) (IPCC, 2001). See also *climate change*.

Coping range – is the range of climate where the outcomes are beneficial or negative but tolerable; beyond the coping range, the damages or loss are no longer tolerable and a society (or system) is said to be vulnerable (TPs 4 and 5).

Cost-benefit analysis – is a quantitative method that makes a detailed comparison of the costs and benefits of a particular measure, or set of measures (TP8). A decision to fund a project, e.g., can depend on the ratio of benefits to costs – the higher the ratio, the more attractive the investment. Its major advantages are its verifiable bottom line and its familiarity to ministries and planning agencies. Disadvantages include limitations regarding the ability to directly address equity considerations and represent non-quantifiable benefits.

Evaluation – is a process for determining systematically and objectively the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness and impact of the adaptation strategies in the light of their objectives (TP9). See also *monitoring*.

Exposure – is the nature and degree to which a system is exposed to significant climatic variations (IPCC, 2001).

Food insecurity – a situation that exists when people lack secure access to sufficient amounts of safe and nutritious food for normal growth and development and an active and healthy life. It may be caused by the unavailability of food, insufficient purchasing power, inappropriate distribution, or inadequate use of food at the household level. Food insecurity may be chronic, seasonal, or transitory. More recent literature focuses on livelihood security – an expansion of food security to include multiple stresses and sectors to which livelihoods might be exposed (TP3).

Hazard – is used here to describe a physically defined climate event with the potential to cause harm, such as heavy rainfall, drought, flood, storm and long-term change in mean climatic variables such as temperature (TPs 4, 5, and 7).

Hazards-based approach – one of several conceptual and analytical approaches to adaptation projects, this approach places its starting emphasis on the biophysical aspects of climate-related risk – i.e., the climate hazard. With the hazards-based approach (also referred to as either the natural hazards-based (TPs 4 and 5) or climate risk-based approach), a project can assess current climate vulnerability or risk in the priority system (TP4), and use climate scenarios to estimate changes in vulnerability or risk over time and space (TP5). See also *adaptation project approaches*.

Hybrid – is used here to refer to approaches that apply uniform and site-specific methods in tandem and within an iterative process to develop and assess the range of adaptation strategies (TP8).

Impacts – are the detrimental and beneficial consequences of climate change on natural and human systems (IPCC, 2001).

Indicators – are quantitative or qualitative parameters that provide a simple and reliable basis for assessing change. In the context of the APF, a set of indicators is used to characterise an adaptation phenomenon, to construct a baseline, and to measure and assess changes in the priority system (TPs 1 and 6). See also *baseline*, *evaluation* and *monitoring*.

Logical Framework (“Logframe”) Analysis Approach – is a project planning tool that includes project goals, objectives and activities, with specific outputs and measurable indicators of achievements.

Measure – see *policies and measures*.

Monitoring – is a mechanism or mechanisms used to track progress in the implementation of an adaptation strategy and its

various components in relation to established targets (TP9). See also *evaluation* and *indicators*.

Policies and measures – usually addressed together, respond to the need for climate adaptation in distinct, but sometimes overlapping ways (TP8). *Policies*, generally speaking, refer to objectives, together with the means of implementation. In an adaptation context, a policy objective might be drawn from the overall policy goals of the country – for instance, the maintenance or strengthening of food security. Ways to achieve this objective might include, e.g., farmer advice and information services, seasonal climate forecasting and incentives for development of irrigation systems. *Measures* can be individual interventions or they can consist of packages of related measures. Specific measures might include actions that promote the chosen policy direction, such as implementing an irrigation project, or setting up a farmer information, advice and early warning programme. Both of these measures would contribute to the national goal of food security. See also *strategy*.

Policy-based approach – is one of several conceptual and analytical approaches that can be applied to adaptation projects. With this approach, a project can test a new policy being framed to see whether it is robust under climate change, or test an existing policy to see whether it manages anticipated risk under climate change (TP6). See also *adaptation project approaches*.

Priority system – is the focus of an adaptation project. The priority system (or systems) is generally characterised by high vulnerability to different climate hazards, as well as strategic importance at local and/or national levels. Socio-economic and biophysical criteria are often used to select priority systems by a given stakeholder group, and to set system parameters (indicators) for a given project (TPs 2 and 3). See also *system*.

Probability defines the likelihood of an event or outcome occurring. Probability can range from being qualitative, using word descriptions such as *likely* or *highly confident*, to quantified ranges and single estimates, depending on the level of understanding of the causes of events, historical time series and future conditions (TP4). See also *risk*.

Project baseline – is a description of where the project is starting from e.g., who is vulnerable to what, and what is currently being done to reduce that vulnerability (TP1). Project baselines are generally focused on the priority system, and are thus site-specific and limited to the duration of the project. Depending on the approach used in an adaptation project, a project baseline will be characterised by a set of quantitative and/or qualitative indicators, and may take the form, e.g., of one of the following:

- a *vulnerability baseline* (TP3)
- a *climate risk baseline* (TPs 4 and 5)
- an *adaptive capacity baseline* (TP7)
- or an *adaptation (policy) baseline* (TP6).

See also the individual baseline definitions. Project baselines can later be used in the monitoring and evaluation process to

measure change (e.g., in vulnerability, adaptive capacity, climate risk) in the priority system, and the effectiveness of adaptation strategies, policies and measures.

Reference scenario – is an internally coherent description of a possible future without consideration of climate change; Depending on a project's needs and design, APF users may choose to develop reference scenarios, or future baselines, that represent future conditions in the priority system, in the absence of climate adaptation (TPs 1 and 6). Additional scenarios, in which various adaptations are applied, may also be developed and compared with reference scenarios to evaluate the implications of different adaptation strategies, policies and measures. Reference scenarios differ from project baselines in that they deal with the longer term and are used for informing policy decisions concerned with various development pathways at the strategic planning level.

Resilience – is the amount of change a system can undergo without changing state (IPCC, 2001).

Risk (climate-related) – is the result of the interaction of physically defined hazards with the properties of the exposed systems – i.e., their sensitivity or (social) vulnerability (TPs 3, 4, 5 and 7). Risk can also be considered as the combination of an event, its likelihood, and its consequences – i.e., risk equals the probability of climate hazard multiplied by a given system's vulnerability. See also *probability* and *vulnerability*.

Scenario – is a plausible and often simplified description of how the future may develop, based on a coherent and internally consistent set of assumptions about driving forces and key relationships. Scenarios may be derived from projections, but are often based on additional information from other sources, sometimes combined with a “narrative storyline” (IPCC, 2001) (TP6). See also *reference scenario*.

Sector – refers to a part or division, as of the economy (e.g., the manufacturing sector, the services sector) or the environment (e.g., water resources, forestry).

Sensitivity (climate-related) – is the degree to which a system is affected, either beneficially or adversely, by climate-related stimuli (IPCC, 2001). Sensitivity affects the magnitude and/or rate of a climate related perturbation or stress (while vulnerability is the degree to which a system is susceptible to harm from that perturbation or stress) (TPs 3 and 4). See also *climate change vulnerability*, *exposure* and *vulnerability*.

Site-specific approaches – seek to develop and assess detailed adaptation strategies on the basis of specific perceptions of vulnerability that have emerged from the full range of stakeholders at the site level (e.g., local communities, local project). See also *uniform approaches*.

Socio-economic vulnerability – is an aggregate measure of human welfare that integrates environmental, social, economic and political exposure to a range of harmful perturbations (TP6).

See also *climate change vulnerability* and *vulnerability*.

Stakeholders – are those who have interests in a particular decision, either as individuals or as representatives of a group. This includes people who influence a decision, or can influence it, as well as those affected by it (Hemmati, 2002) (TPs 1 and 2).

Strategy – refers to a broad plan of action that is implemented through policies and measures. A climate change adaptation strategy for a country refers to a general plan of action for addressing the impacts of climate change, including climate variability and extremes. It may include a mix of policies and measures, selected to meet the overarching objective of reducing the country's vulnerability. Depending on the circumstances, the strategy can be comprehensive at a national level, addressing adaptation across sectors, regions and vulnerable populations, or it can be more limited, focusing on just one or two sectors or regions (TP8). See also *policies and measures*.

System – may refer to a region, a community, a household, an economic sector, a business, a population group, etc., that is exposed to varying degrees to different climate hazards (TPs 1 and 3). See also *priority system*.

Uncertainty – is an expression of the degree to which a value (e.g., the future state of the climate system) is unknown (TP5).

Uniform approaches – seek to develop and assess broad adaptation strategies on the basis of a comprehensive perception of vulnerability that may exist – e.g., across sectors, across regions, across development challenges (TP8). See also *site-specific approaches*.

Vulnerability – The degree to which an *exposure unit* is susceptible to harm due to exposure to a perturbation or stress, and the ability (or lack thereof) of the exposure unit to cope, recover, or fundamentally adapt (become a new system or become extinct) (Kasperson et al., 2000). It can also be considered as the underlying exposure to damaging shocks, perturbations or stresses, rather than the probability or projected incidence of those shocks themselves (TPs 3, 4, and 5). See also *climate change vulnerability* and *socio-economic vulnerability*.

Vulnerability-based approach – one of several conceptual and analytical approaches to adaptation projects, this approach places its starting emphasis on the socio-economic aspects of climate-related risk. With the vulnerability-based approach (TP3), a project focuses on the characterisation of a priority system's vulnerability and assesses how likely critical thresholds of vulnerability are to be exceeded under climate change. Use of the vulnerability-based approach can feed into a larger climate risk assessment (TPs 3, 4 and 5). See also *adaptation project approaches*.

Vulnerability baseline – includes a description of current vulnerabilities to climate variability and events (TPs 3 and 4). See also *project baseline*.

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