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Modalities for the Indicator Work Programme under the Global Goal on Adaptation

Submission in response to Decision 2/CMA.5, para. 41

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About this submission

The ‘United Arab Emirates Framework for Global Climate Resilience’ was adopted at COP28 in December 2023 as a framework for the Global Goal on Adaptation, containing 11 targets. To measure progress achieved towards these targets, it was agreed to launch a two-year work programme on indicators and as a basis for determining how the work programme will conduct its work, Parties and observers were invited to submit views by the end of March 2024. This paper represents a submission to that process.

About the author

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1. Context and aim of the submission

At the UN climate conference COP28, held in Dubai, UAE in December 2023, Parties adopted a framework for the Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA), which was named the ‘United Arab Emirates Framework for Global Climate Resilience’¹ (and referred to in this submission as the *GGA framework*).² The GGA framework includes seven thematic targets and four targets around the steps of the iterative adaptation cycle.

As a next step, it was decided:

“to launch a two-year United Arab Emirates–Belém work programme on indicators for measuring progress achieved towards the targets [...] with a view to identifying and, as needed, developing indicators and potential quantified elements for those targets” (Decision 2/CMA.5, paragraph 39).

As a basis for determining how the work programme will conduct its work, Parties and observers were invited to submit views by end of March 2024 on a) matters related to the work programme and b) modalities “including organization of work, timelines, inputs, outputs and involvement of stakeholders” (Decision 2/CMA.5, paragraph 41).

The aim of this submission is to inform the negotiations on the modalities of the work programme. It builds on previous submissions by the Grantham Research Institute to the workshop series that developed the GGA framework (Leiter, 2023a) and to the report on doubling of adaptation finance by the Standing Committee on Finance (Leiter, 2023b). It also draws on the author’s close involvement in the preceding two-year work programme (the Glasgow–Sharm el-Sheikh work programme on the Global Goal on Adaptation) including as co-facilitator (see section 2), and on his extensive research on adaptation monitoring and evaluation. Ongoing exchange with colleagues and negotiators at various events including most recently at the 2024 Adaptation Forum³ of the Adaptation Committee in March 2024 also informed this submission.

2. Lessons from the Glasgow–Sharm el-Sheikh work programme on the Global Goal on Adaptation (2022–2023)

A two-year work programme on the GGA was launched in November 2021 at COP26 in Glasgow. Halfway into the work programme, at COP27 in Sharm el-Sheikh, it was decided to develop a framework for the GGA (see the review of adaptation negotiations in Leiter, 2022). The work programme comprised eight workshops in 2022 and 2023.⁴ The four workshops in 2023 supported the development of the GGA framework (Leiter, 2023a). In a webinar in February 2024 that reflected on the work programme, several negotiators gave the opinion that the last two workshops in August and September 2023, in Buenos Aires and Gaborone, had been the most productive, since they were highly interactive and provided ample time for negotiators to share views and explore their positions.⁵ The workshops also helped to build trust among negotiators from different groups, a crucial ingredient to the eventual agreement on the GGA framework.

¹ See <https://unfoundation.org/what-we-do/issues/climate-and-energy/uae-framework-for-global-climate-resilience/>

² For a review of the negotiations that led to the development of the framework for the Global Goal on Adaptation, see Leiter (2022).

³ See agenda and presentations at: <https://unfccc.int/event/2024-ac-adapt-forum>

⁴ Workshop agendas and presentations are available at: <https://unfccc.int/topics/adaptation-and-resilience/workstreams/glasgow-sharm-el-sheikh-WP-GGGA#eq-5>

⁵ Webinar by the UN Foundation on 7 February 2024. Recording and presentations available at: <https://unfoundation.org/event/the-uae-framework-on-global-climate-resilience-insights-from-cop-28-and-future-perspectives/>

One of the main issues debated during the workshops was whether the GGA framework should have global targets and what such targets would look like. Several country groups suggested targets in their submissions to the UNFCCC secretariat. The agendas of the workshops in Buenos Aires and Gaborone aimed for negotiators to engage directly in the formulation of targets so that countries could have a shortlist of pre-discussed targets before the start of COP28. However, it proved difficult to substantially discuss the wording of targets “live” at the workshops and to prepare a draft list of potential targets ahead of the conference. As a result, the targets had to be crafted at the last minute, during the final days of COP28.

Lessons for the new indicator work programme therefore are:

1. **Indicators need the involvement of experts in their development and cannot be developed by negotiators alone within a workshop setting.** A lesson from the preceding work programme is that technical expertise needs to be involved, even more so given the breadth and diversity of topics covered under the 11 targets. There is broad agreement among Parties that the indicator work programme needs to involve experts.
2. **The work programme will need to include the preparation of outputs well ahead of COP30.** Leaving the formulation of indicators to COP30 is not a viable strategy. Sharing draft indicator proposals in advance and inviting comments from relevant experts and organisations is the only way of achieving a transparent and inclusive process.
3. **Indicator proposals should be prepared by experts as an output of the work programme, as workshops alone do not produce indicators.** Ideas and comments, including those generated at workshops, need to be elaborated on paper as a basis for discussion. The previous GGA work programme produced workshop reports but no mandate existed for compiling proposals for targets as an interim output ahead of COP28.

3. Key considerations for the modalities of the indicator work programme

The following factors need to be considered when deciding on the modalities of the new work programme:

1. **Timeline.** At the sixth GGA workshop in June 2023 in Bonn, the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (UNCBD) secretariat shared their experience of how they developed their global targets and indicators.⁶ One notable point was that the full process took at least two years from beginning deliberation to adopting an agreed set of indicators. The indicator work programme for the GGA framework spans a two-year period, but in practice there is less than one-and-a-half years between the intersessional negotiations (SB60) in June 2024 in Bonn and COP30 in November 2025 (see Figure 1 below).
2. **Budgetary challenges.** Simon Stiell recently warned that the UNFCCC secretariat is facing “severe financial challenges” and that its budget “is currently less than half funded”.⁷ Of the core budget that is funded by compulsory contributions, almost EUR 40 million is still outstanding for the period 2010–2024.⁸ Only 29 jurisdictions had paid all compulsory contributions as of 1 March 2024, including Azerbaijan, Canada, the EU, eSwatini, Germany, Kuwait, Oman, Poland and Sweden. The funding shortfall could limit the modalities and activities under the indicator work programme.

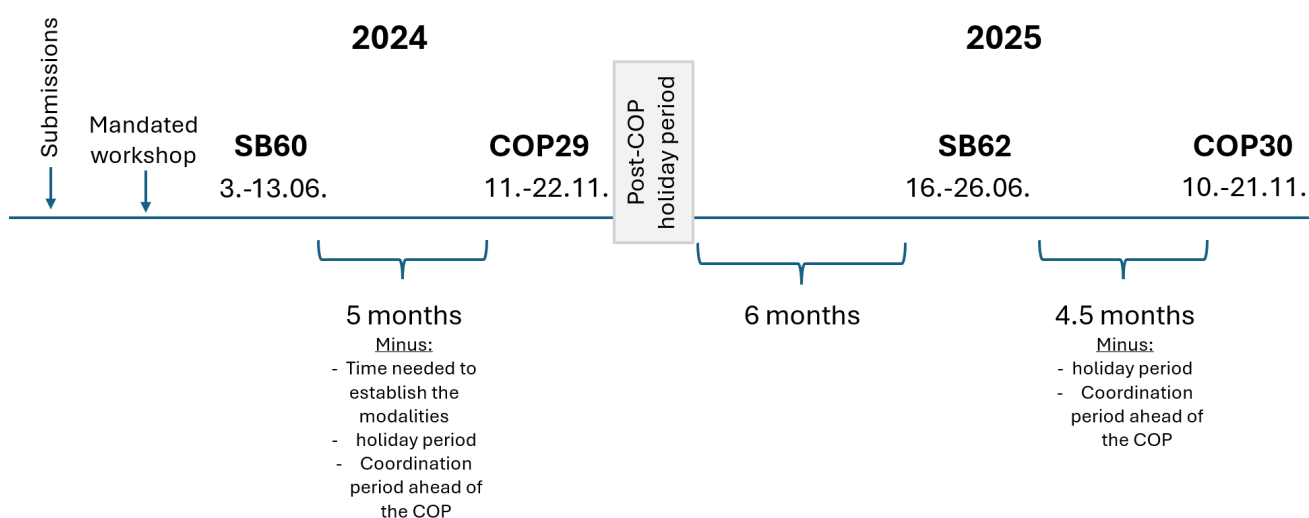
⁶ See agenda, presentations and links to recordings at: <https://unfccc.int/event/sixth-workshop-under-the-glasgow-sharm-el-sheikh-work-programme-on-the-global-goal-on-adaptation>

⁷ <https://www.climatechangenews.com/2024/03/21/uns-climate-body-faces-severe-financial-challenges-putting-work-at-risk/>

⁸ See status of contributions to the core budget: https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/CORE_Contributions_2024-03-01.pdf

3. **Purpose.** It has been decided that the purpose of the GGA framework is “to guide the achievement of the global goal on adaptation and the review of overall progress in achieving it” and that the indicators are meant “for measuring progress achieved towards the targets” (2/CMA.5, paragraphs 7 and 39). The modalities need to be able to meet this agreed purpose.
4. **Transparency and openness.** Each of the 11 targets covers several sub-aspects which together span a wide thematic and dimensional area. It is therefore important to enable the participation of expertise for each of the many aspects and to open up the process to all relevant stakeholders worldwide, regardless of their accreditation status to the UNFCCC. An open and transparent process can greatly increase the legitimacy and acceptance of the outcomes. The modalities therefore need to be transparent and open while managing consultations in an efficient way.

Figure 1. Timeline for the indicator work programme



Note: SB = session of the Subsidiary Bodies

4. Modalities for the involvement of experts

Broad agreement exists across negotiation groups on the need to involve experts in the indicator development process. However, questions remain over *how* to involve them, and how their work would link to the negotiations.

Expert groups

Several Parties and observer organisations have suggested establishing ad hoc expert groups to develop indicator proposals. Some suggest one expert group per target (i.e. 11 groups in total) while others suggest a smaller number of expert groups that each cover multiple targets. An example of the latter would be covering the four targets related to the iterative policy cycle in one group. Among the thematic targets, there are partial overlaps between the aspects of reducing climate-induced water scarcity and attaining climate-resilient food and agricultural production, and between resilient infrastructure and protecting cultural heritage, since the target associated with the latter also mentions ‘climate-resilient infrastructure’. However, each thematic target has its own distinct aspects.

Whichever way the groups are composed, it is important that expertise on each of the aspects covered by the 11 targets will be adequately considered.

The development of indicators for the targets on planning, implementation and monitoring and evaluation can draw on the experiences of the Adaptation Gap Report (UNEP, 2023), the annual

National Adaptation Plan (NAP) progress reports of the secretariat (UNFCCC, 2023), and a global stocktake of national adaptation M&E systems (Leiter, 2021). This strong foundation supports the proposal for a combined expert group on the four targets related to the iterative adaptation cycle.

Arrangements for the involvement of experts

Arranging expert groups in a UN context is less straightforward than it might seem. Table 1 outlines three possible approaches. The first describes the traditional form of an expert group where only its members can participate, deliberate and decide. This approach becomes impractical or unsuitable when the pool of experts or the range of required expertise is large. For instance, adaptation in the water and agriculture sectors is addressed by a large number of researchers, implementers and civil society organisations on all continents. Different contexts (e.g. pastoralism, smallholder farming, farming in semi-arid regions, rain-fed agriculture) all need to be accounted for in indicator formulation. Hence, expert groups could be supplemented by wider consultations (the second approach in Table 1). In this approach, formal membership is no longer a prerequisite for participation, which also lessens tensions around the selection process of the experts. A small number of experts could be charged with steering each group, leading the consultation process with the assistance of the secretariat, and drafting written outputs. Hence, the experts would strongly draw on a wide range of inputs gathered through open consultation.

Another approach would be for each group to be led by the secretariat, which would also conduct the consultation process (the third approach in Table 1). This would avoid the need for a selection process of experts. However, since the secretariat is unlikely to have the breadth of expertise available in-house to cover all aspects of the 11 targets, experts would still need to be involved at least in the drafting of outputs. Moreover, this approach would assign a lot of work to an already stretched secretariat.

Each of these approaches is compatible with any allocation of targets to groups. In other words, the selection of an approach is independent from the number of groups, be it one group for each target or combined groups that cover multiple targets.

Table 1. Approaches to the involvement of experts

	Approach	Description	Advantages/disadvantages
Narrow participation	A closed expert group	Only members of the expert group can participate.	Advantage: Easier to manage than a larger group and public consultations. Disadvantages: Exclusion of expertise of non-members and political wrangling over nominations.
Decoupling of membership and participation	Steering group of experts combined with open consultations	A small number of recognised experts steer each group and draft the written outputs. Open consultations are an important part of this approach. The secretariat assists, e.g. with communication and IT for online consultations.	Advantage: Broadens participation far beyond members of the expert group.
	No formal membership. Primarily consultations. Experts support the compilation of outputs	No formal membership in groups and no nominated experts. The UNFCCC secretariat conducts the consultation process on all targets to gather a wide range of inputs. Compilation of outputs is done by or assisted by experts who are contracted or otherwise available to the secretariat.	Advantage: No selection process for formal membership required (but some collaboration with experts to compile or review outputs will still be needed). Disadvantage: Requires a lot of human capacity at the UNFCCC secretariat. Partly shifts work from experts to the secretariat.

Selection of experts

The first two approaches described above require a selection of experts. Table 2 outlines three nomination processes through which they might be identified. These are not mutually exclusive and could be combined.

Table 2. Three options for identifying experts

Type of nomination	Advantages/disadvantages
Nominations by Parties	<p>Advantage: Could increase the acceptance of technical outputs.</p> <p>Disadvantage: Could limit scope of experts and lead to a political rather than technical focus; experts not connected to the government would be unlikely to be nominated.</p>
Endorsement by accredited organisations, international or UN organisations	<p>Disadvantage: Creates entry barriers (if a requirement).</p> <p>Advantage: Supports selection among many interested candidates.</p>
Self-nomination	<p>Advantage: No entry barriers.</p> <p>Disadvantage: Could attract a large number of applications and require associated selection capacities.</p>

All three types of nominations should be linked to clear and transparent selection criteria. Since expertise is the rationale for creating the expert groups, the foremost criterion should be profound expertise on aspects covered by the targets. Candidates should have experience of facilitation and of writing assessment reports. The selection process could be based on a standard list of criteria or on a set of core criteria that are mandatory and additional ones that are desirable and whose fulfilment would increase a candidate's ranking.

Suggested core criteria

- Profound expertise on adaptation to climate change in relation to a target or to one of its mentioned aspects⁹
- Authorship of scientific articles, studies or reports on a topic of the respective expert group
- Solid knowledge of monitoring and evaluation, progress assessment and indicators
- Sufficient availability over the course of the work programme (especially for co-facilitators)

Additional criteria to select the best fitting candidates

- Professional experience in direct relation to a target or to one of its mentioned aspects
- High expertise in monitoring and evaluation
- Experience in developing indicators
- Experience working at the science–policy interface or in supporting decision-making
- Contributions to global assessment reports
- Facilitation of outreach events
- Familiarity with the UNFCCC process or with negotiations of other global frameworks

The advantages of having a two-tier criteria system include ensuring that all candidates meet necessary requirements while also aiding the selection from many candidates through additional

⁹ Each of the 11 targets contained in decision 2/CMA.5 contains multiple specifications that are referred to in this submission as "aspects".

criteria and providing flexibility for candidates from underrepresented groups (who could be selected on the basis of the core criteria). Expertise and the ability to meaningfully contribute to the purpose of the expert groups should be at the core of the selection process. Accordingly, the selection should not be organised around geographical jurisdictions like the UN regional groups but should be centrally administered by the UNFCCC secretariat under the guidance of one or more relevant bodies.

Applications/nominations should be specific to a particular expert group which requires that the expert groups are determined before the selection process starts. The composition of experts needs to be such that expertise regarding all aspects mentioned under the respective targets are included. The target on protecting cultural heritage must therefore include experts from communities of Indigenous Peoples. Furthermore, to keep it technical, active negotiators should not be part of the expert groups. Instead, negotiators with relevant expertise could engage in the linkage between the technical and the political level (see below).

Size and organisation of the expert groups

Closed expert groups would need to be sufficiently large to include expertise on the full scope of each target. The membership would also need to include representation from different regions and contexts. For the thematic targets, this would probably mean at least a dozen or several dozen experts per target. Since the scope of the thematic targets varies, the size of the expert groups could differ, too. The dimensional targets are narrower in scope and could operate with a smaller number of experts.

A **steering group of experts**, the second approach, would only require a small number of experts per target since the consultation process would be the primary way of gathering inputs from all contexts. The number of experts could vary between targets due to their different scope. It would also depend on whether a group covered one or multiple targets.

Each expert group could have two co-facilitators and, if deemed useful, possibly also two deputies. Sub-groups could be formed as needed for the different aspects that each target covers. Each sub-group could have its own co-leads.

Coordination between expert groups

Coordination between the expert groups would have three main tasks:

- Identifying overlaps or connections between the scope of the targets
- Exploring whether there are any interconnections between assessments of progress
- Updating groups about each other's progress

Groups whose targets are relatively closely interlinked, especially between the dimensional targets, the agriculture and water target, and the agriculture and poverty target, could coordinate directly between their co-facilitators. Coordination between all groups and regular updates could be facilitated by the secretariat.

An **overarching expert/coordination group** could also be considered, to ensure consistency across the groups' work and to act as a link to the negotiations. Such an arrangement could be needed since the secretariat might face capacity limitations when having to coordinate a large number of expert groups. Each expert group would work under its respective co-facilitators. The overarching group would not manage the work of the groups but would help create consistency of outputs across the groups and could facilitate the understanding and uptake of proposals by negotiators (see below). The overarching coordination group could either consist of the co-facilitators of all expert groups or a group of specialists on M&E of adaptation who are familiar with the negotiations. The latter could assist in bridging the technical and political spheres in close coordination with the secretariat.

Linkage between the expert groups and the negotiations

Ultimately, a political decision is needed about the way progress towards the GGA and its framework is measured. Hence, a linkage is required between the expert groups and the negotiations. The expert groups (e.g. via their co-facilitators) would explain the proposed indicators and any interim outputs to the negotiators while the negotiators or a body determined for this purpose could provide guidance to the expert groups. This body or bodies might also be involved in the selection process or in the nomination of experts.

A delicate matter is whether the outputs of the expert groups would be formally adopted or approved by a body or by the Parties to the Paris Agreement (referred to as the 'CMA'¹⁰). Any sign-off or approval would likely see demands from negotiators to edit outputs, which could reintroduce politics into the technical process of drafting indicator proposals. The sensitivity around documents containing proposed targets and indicators was on full display at SB58 in June 2023, which almost ended with no agreement on the way forward for the GGA work programme over the status of an informal note that was mentioned in a footnote. One way to avoid such a scenario is not to plan for any of the outputs of the expert groups to be adopted or approved by any negotiation body, but to keep them as documents prepared by the ad hoc expert groups or their co-facilitators in their own capacity.¹¹ The outputs could be published without the UNFCCC logo and would have no legal standing but would provide detailed information from which negotiators could draw. Parties could decide to welcome or take note of the outcomes of the expert groups as they do with other documents. In 2025, negotiators would work on text proposals that draw from the outputs of the expert groups. With such a clear distinction between the outputs of the expert groups and those of the negotiations, any complications from trying to edit the numerous outputs of the expert groups to reflect different negotiation positions would be avoided. This could greatly enhance the efficiency of the work of the expert groups.

5. Modalities for process, milestones and outputs

In light of the timeline shown in Figure 1, it is essential that SB60 in June 2024 agrees to modalities for the indicator work programme, otherwise the ability to develop technically sound indicators before the end of 2025 for the 11 targets would be seriously jeopardised. At a minimum, Parties need to agree to modalities for work to be carried out by COP29. The mandated workshop scheduled for 15–17 May 2024 provides an opportunity for negotiators and experts to discuss modalities ahead of SB60.¹²

Another lesson from the GGA work programme is that proposals for indicators need to be put on paper and be open to public comment in order to generate proposals well in advance of COP30 (see section 2 above). Accordingly, the expert groups could produce **two main outputs**:

- A stocktake of existing indicators and data sources
- Proposed indicators for the 11 targets

The stocktake would identify what is already available, including from reporting under other global Conventions, how far it can be used to track progress towards the adaptation-specific targets of the GGA framework, and what gaps remain. The indicator proposals would be specific suggestions for “indicators and potential quantified elements for those targets” (Decision 2/CMA.5, para 39).

¹⁰ <https://unfccc.int/process/bodies/supreme-bodies/conference-of-the-parties-serving-as-the-meeting-of-the-parties-to-the-paris-agreement-cma>

¹¹ This is yet another reason why active negotiators cannot be members of the expert groups, especially not as co-facilitators. Their fellow negotiators would perceive them as negotiators, which would trigger demands from other Parties to also engage in the expert groups.

¹² See <https://unfccc.int/event/workshop-under-the-uae-belem-work-programme-on-indicators> for details about the workshop.

Given the broad scope of the thematic targets, the diversity of contexts and of organisations working on adaptation, a consultation that is open beyond UNFCCC-accredited organisations would be the most inclusive and could yield the broadest scope of inputs. Under the second approach outlined in Table 1, it would then be for the experts to produce the outputs by screening and synthesising the information received during the consultation phase and distilling it into written outputs.

For the two main outputs (the stocktake and indicator proposals) experts would deliberate based on their own expertise before undertaking a public consultation process and subsequently produce a draft version. This draft would then be open for public comments for two to three weeks. Based on the comments, the experts would produce a final stocktake document by COP29 and a revised document with indicator proposals by SB62 (see Figure 2). Each expert group would produce these two main outputs for the targets it covers. Further iterations of the indicator proposals or other inputs to the negotiation process could be mandated for the second half of 2025. SB62 in June 2025 could fine-tune the ensuing process to best facilitate convergence of a political agreement.

As explained in section 4, it is suggested that outputs of the expert groups take the form of informal documents that remain outside of the official UNFCCC document classification system. This would avoid the need for approval by any body under the Convention or the Paris Agreement. Apart from avoiding desires for political editing, it would also save vital time. For instance, getting from a draft of the stocktake to a final version in just two weeks after the end of the public commenting period would not be possible if formal approval were required.

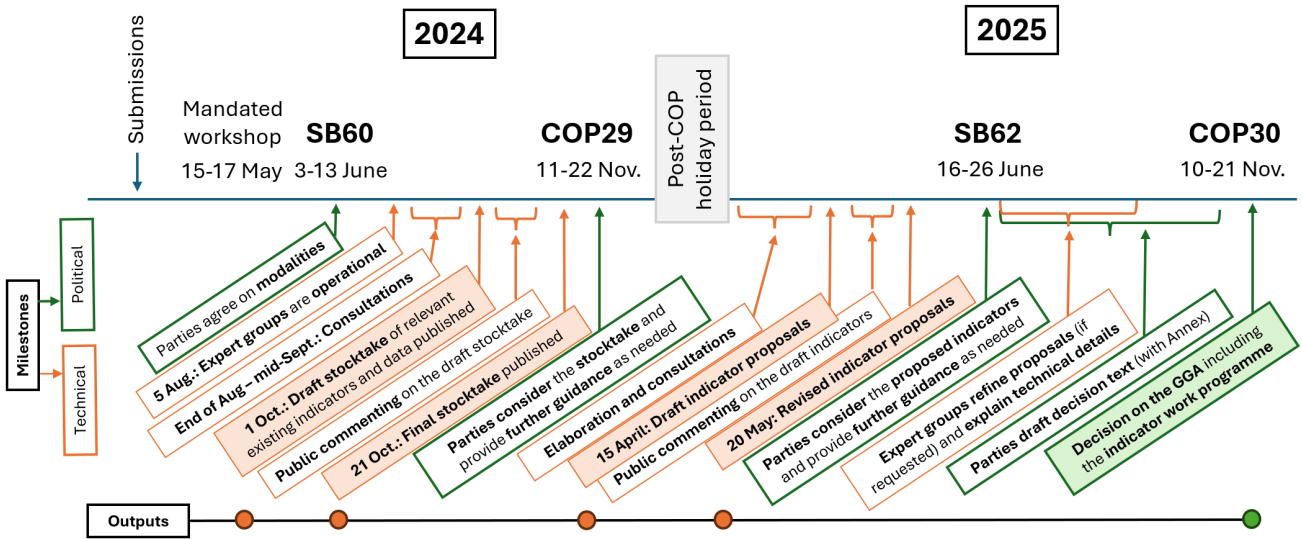
Should SB60 agree on the establishment of ad hoc expert groups, it is estimated that it would take at least until the end of August to have them operational, meaning that co-facilitators and members have been selected (under either the first or second approach in Table 1). The remaining period of two-and-a-half months would not allow the final version of the stocktake to be published far ahead of COP29, but Parties could consult on the draft version for their deliberations, which would be available around six weeks before the COP conference.

The stocktake of available indicators and data sources would provide Parties with a solid basis with which to reflect on the need for further guidance for the second year of the indicator work programme. It is envisioned that expert groups would proceed after COP29 with developing indicator proposals for the targets they cover, and that they would convene another consultation process to this end. A draft could be issued in April 2025 and a subsequent public review period would commence for two-to-three weeks. Expert groups could publish a revised version around a month later, just ahead of SB62. It is important to consider that some targets will likely attract a greater volume of comments than others and their outputs would therefore be more time-consuming to produce. Some expert groups might therefore publish their outputs earlier than others. It would also be possible for expert groups to publish separate documents for individual targets if they deem it useful. This flexibility could account for differences in breadth of targets' aspects and could accommodate working arrangements of expert groups (e.g. if sub-groups on particular aspects are formed).

On the basis of the revised indicator proposals coming from the expert groups, Parties would begin by SB62 at the latest to negotiate what content from the expert groups they would adopt or modify and in what form. Should countries converge on an Annex to a decision (with the Annex containing indicators for adoption), Parties would ideally produce textual options for such an Annex before COP30. Ultimately, the hope is to avoid a situation as at COP28 where the targets had to be drafted at the very last minute. Expert groups, especially their co-facilitators, would remain available during the second half of 2025 to either further revise indicator proposals or support the process in other ways as mandated by Parties.

Figure 2 below outlines the process, milestones and outputs for the period until COP30. It needs to be underscored that the timeline is ambitious, not least when compared with the experiences of similar processes under the Sendai Framework and the CBD. The suggested milestone dates are indicative only, and the process during the second half of 2025 could be further refined as the indicator work programme unfolds.

Figure 2. Milestones and outputs for the indicator work programme



It might also be necessary to manage expectations of stakeholders outside of the negotiation process about what the indicator work programme can and cannot do. For instance, a question was raised during a public webinar on the outcomes of COP28 asking if the indicator work programme would engage in capacity-building for indicator development in developing countries. While indicator development should always be in relation to a particular purpose (Leiter et al., 2019), there will be clear limits in terms of financial resources, time availability of experts and capacity available at the secretariat. In fact, experts' time availability is a crucial factor – it cannot be taken for granted that experts will be able to provide very significant amounts of time over a one-and-a-half-year period and without financial compensation.

The scarcity of funding and the geographical distribution of experts across the globe mean that most of the work of the expert groups and the consultation process will likely be carried out online. However, each expert group or co-facilitators and steering group experts should attempt to meet at least once in person, if feasible. There could also be joint workshops between experts and negotiations to facilitate the linkage between the technical outputs and the political ones.

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