Alignment to Advance Climate-Resilient Development

OVERVIEW BRIEF 2: Getting Started on Alignment

This is the second in a series of briefs focusing on alignment of country efforts under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Paris Agreement and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. The brief explores how countries can get started on aligning different policy processes by defining alignment objectives, identifying entry points and putting enabling factors in place.

1. Introduction

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Paris Agreement and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) share objectives related to climate-resilient development (United Nations, 2015; United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, 2015; United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, 2015). As countries make progress on defining how they will contribute to these agendas, there are considerable opportunities to increase coherence, efficiency and effectiveness through alignment of policy processes. The first brief in this series focused on defining alignment and presenting the rationale for aligning these different, yet related, processes. Recognizing that a number of factors will influence how, when and to what degree alignment can be achieved in a particular country context, it introduced a continuum of approaches to alignment, ranging from informal to systematic.

Key Messages

- As countries establish national commitments to global agendas and outline plans and strategies for climate-resilient development, considerable opportunities exist to pursue alignment of these policy processes.

- Alignment of country-level policy processes under global agendas can occur within a particular agenda (for example, by aligning processes at different levels) or across agendas, by ensuring that related policy processes are mutually supportive.

- As the NAP process is iterative and explicitly aims to integrate climate change adaptation in development processes across sectors and levels, it provides important opportunities to advance climate-resilient development, thereby contributing to objectives under multiple agendas.

- Institutional arrangements, capacity development and information sharing are key enablers for alignment.

This brief builds on this introduction and provides a concise overview of the practical considerations associated with initiating alignment of policy processes toward climate-resilient development, complementing other more detailed guidance.[1] The brief explores how the different agendas and policy processes relate to each other and to a country's national development planning processes. It describes the enabling factors for alignment and discusses how alignment objectives can be defined. Further, the brief outlines key questions that can help to identify entry points for alignment, recognizing that different approaches to alignment may be relevant and feasible in specific contexts and at particular points in time.

2. Relationships Between the Different Policy Processes

To get started on alignment, it is helpful to first map out the relationships between the different global agendas and policy processes.[2] Global agendas present current collective goals and/or targets that participating countries are expected to work toward. A number of different policy processes in the countries are linked to these agendas and can be differentiated as follows:
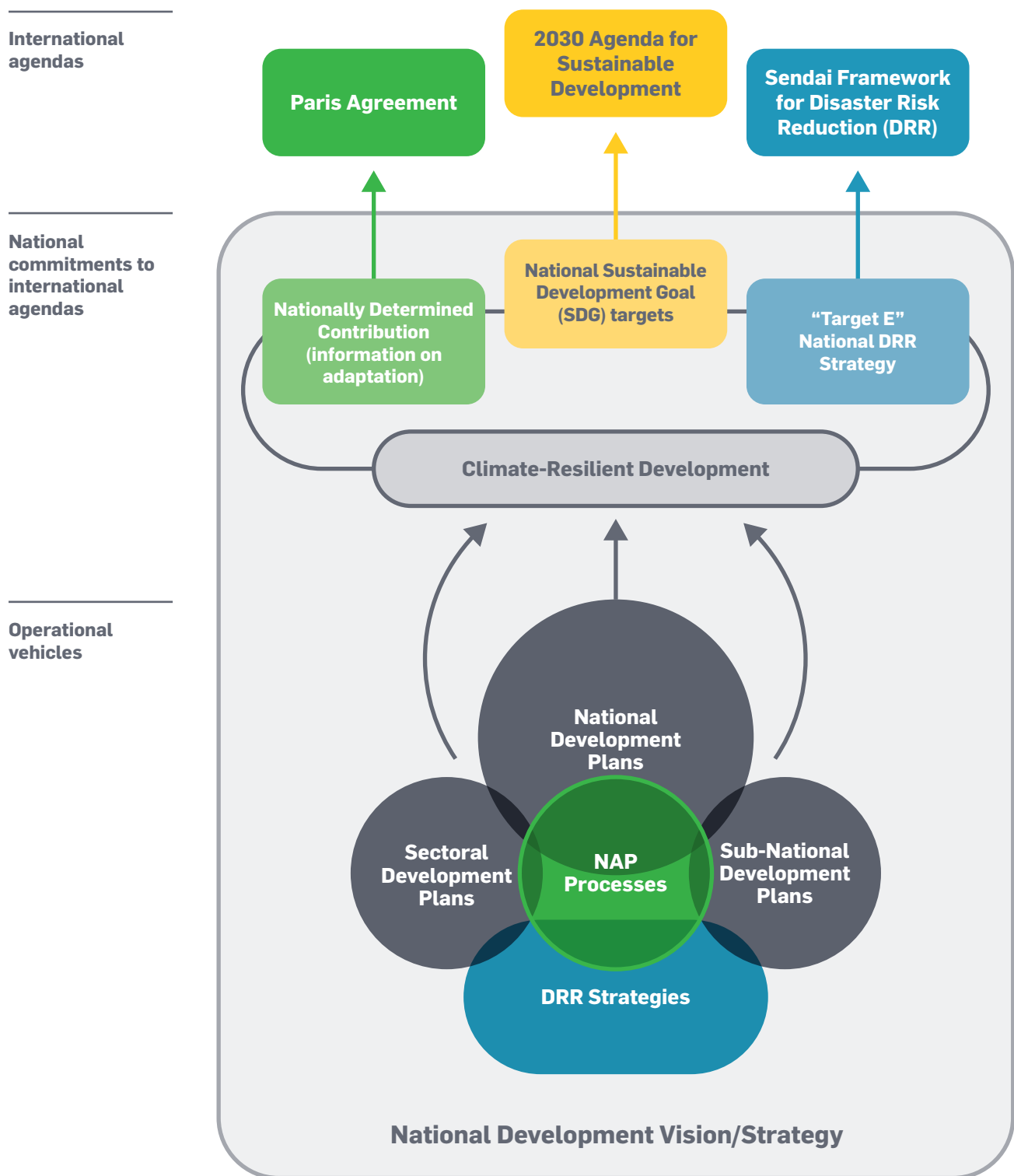
- **National development visions**, which outline the overarching ambitions for country development processes, providing a foundation for all of the other policy processes.
- **National commitments to international agendas**, which establish concrete targets for countries to achieve, in the context of their development vision, to contribute to international agendas. These include national Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) targets, Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and national commitments to the Sendai Framework targets.
- **Operational vehicles**, which are plans or strategies that elaborate how national commitments will be achieved. These include overarching development plans, as well as plans developed for specific sectors or by sub-national authorities. National Adaptation Plan (NAP) processes and national DRR strategies are also operational vehicles.

Figure 1 presents the relationships between the global agendas and the different types of policy processes described above. It incorporates policy processes that have emerged in response to the international agendas (such as NDCs, which outline commitments to the goals of the Paris Agreement), as well as core policy processes that were in place before the international agendas were agreed (for example, most countries already had some form of national development plan in place before the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was established). As shown in the figure, there are linkages from the operational vehicles to the international agendas, via the national commitments, which present opportunities for alignment of policy processes within a particular agenda. This involves ensuring that operational vehicles support the achievement of commitments to international agendas. Likewise, there are linkages between the different policy processes at the same level, which present opportunities for alignment across the agendas. In this case, it is about ensuring that policy processes are mutually supportive and are not undertaken in isolation of one another.

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[1] See, for example: Bouyé, Harmeling, & Schulz, 2018; GIZ, 2017.
[2] Policy processes that have been established under the global agendas include individual commitments, strategies and plans for meeting the objectives therein (Dazé, Terton & Maass, 2018).

Figure 1. Mapping the agendas and in-country policy processes

International agendas

- Paris Agreement
- 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
- Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR)

National commitments to international agendas

- Nationally Determined Contribution (information on adaptation)
- National Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) targets
- "Target E" National DRR Strategy

Climate-Resilient Development

Operational vehicles

- National Development Plans
- Sectoral Development Plans
- NAP Processes
- Sub-National Development Plans
- DRR Strategies

National Development Vision/Strategy

It must be emphasized that this is by no means a linear process; in reality, the various policy processes are unfolding concurrently, with different timelines, outputs and actors involved. In a particular country, understanding the relationships between the different policy processes provides a basis for defining objectives and determining entry points for alignment, as described in the following sections.

From a climate-resilient development point of view, the NAP process represents an important connecting point, as it explicitly aims to integrate climate change adaptation in relevant development policies, plans and initiatives. This can serve to meet commitments under Agenda 2030 and the Sendai Framework, as well as the Paris Agreement. Further, as an iterative process, it may present opportunities to increase alignment at different stages. As described in Box 1, the common approaches that are defined across the different agendas represent another potential connection point between the processes, yielding opportunities for alignment, particularly at sub-national levels.

Box 1. Common approaches across the agendas

Each of the international agendas being discussed in this brief lays out a set of principles intended to guide countries in undertaking the related policy processes. These are generally aimed at ensuring that the processes are effective, inclusive and that implementation will yield results that are both equitable and sustainable. A number of these are common across the different agendas:

- **Multistakeholder approaches:** Achievement of resilience and sustainable development require the engagement of a broad range of actors beyond the government, including civil society organizations, private sector actors and the research community.

- **Linking national and sub-national planning and action:** The impacts of climate change and disasters are largely felt at the local level, meaning that sub-national authorities, communities and other local organizations are essential actors in adaptation and resilience building. Vertical integration of adaptation and DRR across levels of development planning and implementation are critical to ensuring that local actors have the knowledge, capacity and resources to manage climate risks (Dazé, Price-Kelly, & Rass, 2016).

- **Inclusive approaches that recognize vulnerable groups:** The fact that some groups are more vulnerable than others to the same climate and disaster risks means that these groups may require particular consideration in efforts to build resilience and adaptive capacity.

- **Integration of gender considerations:** It is commonly acknowledged that gender equality and women's empowerment are both goals of and prerequisites for sustainable development and resilience building. Women and men experience the impacts of climate change and disasters differently and have differing needs, opportunities and capacities for adaptation. These differences must be understood and inequalities addressed if climate-resilient development efforts are to be effective (Dazé & Dekens, 2017).

- **Ecosystem-based approaches:** Healthy ecosystems provide an essential foundation for development that is sustainable and resilient. Ecosystem-based approaches aim to restore, conserve and manage ecosystem services in ways that build the resilience of people and the ecosystems they rely on (Terton & Dazé, 2018).

In addition to being internationally agreed priniciples, these approaches are critically important for advancing climate-resilient development.

3. Enabling Factors for Alignment

Though there are clear benefits to aligning different policy processes as outlined in the [first alignment overview brief](#), it is unlikely to happen without a strong commitment by relevant actors and the creation of an enabling environment, supported by effective institutional arrangements and information sharing mechanisms, as well as investments in capacity development.[3]

Effective **institutional arrangements** must be in place to facilitate alignment. Different institutions generally hold responsibility for the different policy processes. While NAPs and NDCs are typically led by environment ministries, SDGs often fall under the ministry responsible for planning and/or economic development. In addition, line ministries focusing on water, agriculture and infrastructure, among others, are generally implicated in these processes. Institutional linkages must be created between these different actors to facilitate coordination during all stages, from planning through to reporting. Many governments have invested a great deal of time and energy in attempting to achieve better coordination across sectors and levels of government, and have a number of mechanisms at their disposal. However, despite the existence of such coordination mechanisms, meaningful policy coordination remains a challenge. Understanding what will work in a particular context, be it top-down mandates for coordination or more informal mechanisms, is key to ensuring that that the institutional arrangements and coordination mechanisms for alignment are fit for purpose and incorporate flexibility to respond to emerging challenges and opportunities.

Information sharing among the different actors involved is critical for alignment. Again, information sharing is required both across and within institutions and across levels of government, as well as with non-governmental stakeholders. The information needs will differ based on the role and perspective of the actor. National-level policy-makers require information on plans, available resources and gaps, as well as on progress and lessons learned to inform future decision making. Implementing agencies will need to understand overarching plans, detailed implementation strategies, and monitoring and reporting requirements. Actors at sub-national levels will need information on climate risks and changes to inform decision making on an ongoing basis, as well as information on their roles and responsibilities in climate-resilient development processes.

Finally, **capacity development** supports efficient and effective processes toward climate-resilient development. The capacities needed for alignment range from knowledge of the different international processes and commitments, to analytical capacities to assess synergies and trade-offs, to facilitation capacity for coordination and consensus building among different actors. In addition to these process-related capacities, technical capacities are needed to understand climate information and apply it in decision making, as well as to identify appropriate actions for different scenarios, sectors and groups. Practically speaking, finance and human resources are also needed. In most countries, some capacity development will likely be needed for alignment to occur. At the same time, alignment should lead to harmonized efforts to build capacities of different actors to fulfill their roles and responsibilities related to climate-resilient development.

Countries need to consider how to put these in place to move alignment forward. In relation to these enabling factors, key questions to consider in identifying entry points are presented in Section 5.

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[3]   These enabling factors were first identified in relation to the NAP process, in the NAP Global Network's guidance note on vertical integration (Dazé, Price-Kelly, & Rass, 2016). We have since come to see them as key to many aspects of the NAP process, including alignment with other policy processes.

4. Defining Alignment Objectives

As noted in the first brief, how countries approach alignment depends on a number of factors, including political will, institutional structures, power dynamics and capacities. There is no single approach to pursuing alignment. To define the objectives of alignment processes, it is important to understand which actors are involved in the policy processes, how the respective processes are unfolding and how the links between them are perceived. In order to get started, there are four key steps countries may consider in determining alignment objectives:

- **Identify the actors that are interested in working toward alignment:** Alignment requires collaboration among the different actors involved in leading and supporting the different policy processes. Alignment efforts are most likely to be effective if there is a shared goal among the relevant actors, which facilitates sharing of information, joint stakeholder engagement and the flexibility required for alignment to occur. It is therefore helpful to first consider which institutions or individuals are most likely to collaborate on alignment.

- **Decide which processes to start with:** For many countries, aligning multiple processes at once may not be feasible (or even desirable). In some contexts, it may make sense to begin by focusing on a limited number of policy processes where clear synergies exist. This may involve alignment across agendas (for example, by aligning NAP processes with DRR strategies—see Box 2) or within a particular agenda (for example, by aligning NAP processes with the adaptation components of NDCs—see Box 3). By focusing on alignment of processes where entry points are relatively easy to determine, countries can create a foundation for alignment with other processes where there may be more complexity.

- **Agree on the degree of alignment to aim for:** The likely starting point for most countries is informal alignment, characterized by information sharing and ad hoc coordination. As commitment to alignment increases, countries may move along the spectrum to more strategic approaches involving formal coordination mechanisms and joint initiatives. Systematic alignment, comprising a shared vision for climate-resilient development, systematic coordination among relevant actors and harmonized implementation strategies for the different policy processes, may represent a longer-term goal in some contexts. It may make sense to invest in strategic or systematic alignment of some processes while remaining informal for others.

- **Articulate the desired outcome of alignment:** Taking all of the above into account, countries should consider the desired outcome of the alignment process. Is it to create an overarching planning framework to guide implementation of efforts under different agendas? Is it to come up with a common monitoring and evaluation framework? Is it to use human and financial resources more efficiently? There are many reasons to invest in alignment, and it is helpful at the outset to agree on the envisioned results.

The objectives of alignment may evolve over time, as the policy processes advance and progress is made on different aspects of alignment. Leaders of alignment processes should periodically assess the above issues and evaluate progress toward the desired outcome, adjusting the approach as needed.

Box 2. Initiating alignment within an agenda: NAP processes and NDCs

NDCs and NAP processes represent important elements of countries' responses to climate change, in line with the Paris Agreement. In countries where adaptation information is included in NDCs, the two policy processes are interrelated: NDCs communicate the goals and targets that are envisioned for adaptation, while NAP processes elaborate how adaptation will be planned, implemented and monitored. As such, the NAP process can function as the operational vehicle for implementing adaptation-related commitments that are included in an NDC (Hammill & Price-Kelly, 2016, 2017).

Given this close relationship, NDCs and NAP processes may be a good starting point for considering alignment. Because the two processes fall under a single agenda and similar actors are often leading the two processes, it is likely that strategic or even systematic alignment can be achieved. The desired outcome of aligning the NAP process and the NDC will depend on the content of the NDC and the status of the NAP process (Hammill & Price-Kelly, 2016, 2017), but could include:

- Using adaptation information in the NDC as an overarching framework for the NAP process.
- Using the NAP process as a means to operationalize adaptation commitments in the NDC.
- Using the NDC to build political support for the NAP process.
- Using the NAP process to inform the development of future NDCs.

In any of the above cases, the process should also take into consideration other commitments, including national targets for the SDGs and the Sendai Framework for DRR. Alignment of the NDC and the NAP process provides a useful basis for identifying potential synergies related to climate-resilient development.

5. Identifying Entry Points for Initiating Alignment

Having defined the objectives of the alignment process, countries can turn their attention to the practical aspects by identifying entry points. Table 1 presents key questions that countries may consider in order to find the most feasible entry points to initiate alignment.

Table 1. Key questions to consider when identifying entry points for alignment

Identifying synergies	What are the objectives of the different policy processes and where do these objectives converge? Are there common areas of focus or cross-cutting themes? Do the policy processes apply similar approaches (see Box 1)? What are the potential trade-offs associated with alignment (e.g., slowing down individual processes; additional resource requirements)? Are there trade-offs between the different objectives of policy processes related to climate-resilient development?
Mapping the processes	Which actors have a coordinating function for the policy processes? Which actors are involved? Where are the overlaps? What are the timelines for the different processes? What are the key milestones in the different policy processes, such as the development of particular documents (plans, strategies, etc.)? Are review and/or update mechanisms in place that create opportunities for alignment? Are ongoing or planned stakeholder engagement processes established that could be coordinated to achieve alignment? Has funding been secured for one or more of the processes? Can this be used to meet the objectives of other processes?
Institutional arrangements	Are there existing coordination mechanisms for climate change adaptation and/or DRR that can serve as a platform for alignment discussions? Where do champions for alignment sit within the government? How can they be engaged to facilitate action?
Information sharing	What platforms or mechanisms already exist for information sharing on climate change adaptation, DRR and SDG reporting? Are there common information needs among stakeholders involved in the different processes? What are the criteria for data collection? Is it possible to share data or use common data sources?
Capacity development	What human resources have been assigned for the different processes? What are the common capacity needs and gaps across the different processes? What investments in capacity development are planned? How can these support alignment?
Financing	Have financing needs for implementation been identified? If so, where do they converge? Have actions been prioritized that meet multiple objectives to ensure efficient use of limited resources? Have the benefits of aligned approaches and mutually supportive actions been articulated in ways that will attract finance from external sources?

Answering these questions can help to identify suitable entry points and upcoming opportunities for taking action to align policy processes. Concretely, these may include:

- The development or update of a particular policy document under one of the processes.
- Context analysis (for example, vulnerability assessments or gender analyses) conducted to inform planning or implementation under one of the processes.
- Meetings or strategic planning processes of interministerial and/or cross-sectoral coordination mechanisms for climate change adaptation, DRR and/or SDG implementation.
- Stakeholder engagement events or mechanisms under one of the processes.
- Creation of multistakeholder platforms for information sharing or capacity development for adaptation and/or DRR.
- Launching implementation of programs or initiatives under one of the processes (for example, launch of a NAP readiness program funded by the Green Climate Fund).
- Development of guidelines, tools and/or training related to climate change adaptation and/or DRR.
- Efforts to engage sub-national actors in planning and implementation for adaptation and/or DRR.

Box 3 presents an example of potential entry points for alignment across the Paris Agreement and the Sendai Framework for DRR, focusing on aligning NAP processes and DRR strategies.

6. Next Steps

This brief has discussed the different types of policy processes that may be undertaken at the national level, in line with the international agendas, noting that alignment can occur across agendas (for example, by aligning NAP processes with DRR strategies) or within a single agenda (for example, by aligning NAP processes with adaptation components of NDCs). Defining the objectives of alignment—in terms of which processes to focus on, the degree of alignment to aim for and the desired outcomes—is an important first step in initiating alignment. With defined objectives, countries can identify concrete entry points for alignment of these different policy processes. The next brief in the series will identify key actions that countries can take to work toward these objectives, focusing on alignment of NDCs and NAP processes.

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