

Potential activities in the area of adaptive capacity assessment

Concept note

Recommended action by the Adaptation Committee

The Adaptation Committee, at its 28th meeting, will be invited to take note of this concept note and provide further guidance to the secretariat.

I. Background

1. At its 26th meeting (AC 26), the Adaptation Committee (AC) discussed the need to strengthen work in the area of adaptive capacity assessment, acknowledging its foundational role in enabling effective adaptation planning, implementation, and monitoring. As part of its flexible workplan for 2025–2027, under Workstream 1, the AC agreed to continue consideration of draft proposals in this area at AC 27.
2. Adaptive capacity is the potential or ability of a system, region, or community to adapt to the effects or impacts of climate change. Enhancement of adaptive capacity represents a practical means of coping with changes and uncertainties in climate, including variability and extremes. In this way, enhancement of adaptive capacity reduces vulnerabilities and promotes sustainable development (IPCC, 2007).¹ Unlike vulnerability, impact, and risk assessments, methodologies for assessing adaptive capacity remain less standardized, especially in the context of developing countries and local-level contexts. AC members identified this gap as an urgent area for technical guidance.
3. During an intersessional call held on 8 April 2025, AC members reaffirmed their support for this activity and emphasized the need to clarify the conceptual basis of adaptive capacity, map existing assessment methodologies, and propose feasible and resource-efficient modalities for future work.
4. At its 27th meeting, the AC agreed to consider this agenda item at its next meeting.

II. Understanding adaptive capacity

1. Definition and relevance

5. Adaptive capacity is a core component of climate risk and resilience frameworks and is explicitly referenced in the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reports.² It shapes the extent to which actors and systems can manage current and future climate hazards. Yet, it remains an under-assessed dimension due to its complex, context-specific, and multi-scalar nature.

¹ See <https://archive.ipcc.ch/ipccreports/tar/wg2/index.php?idp=643#:~:text=Adaptive%20capacity%20is%20the%20potential,or%20impacts%20of%20climate%20change>.

² See footnote 1.

2. Linkages with risk and vulnerability assessment

6. While vulnerability assessments consider exposure, sensitivity, and adaptive capacity, methodologies often overemphasize hazard and exposure dimensions, with adaptive capacity receiving limited analytical depth. This impedes efforts to understand barriers, enablers, and capacity-building needs at different governance levels.

7. Clarifying and delineating the concept of adaptive capacity vis-à-vis impact, vulnerability, and risk assessments is critical for:

- (a) Enhancing NAP processes and adaptation communications;
- (b) Supporting implementation of the United Arab Emirates Framework for Global Climate Resilience and informing tracking of progress towards the global goal on adaptation.

3. Existing methodologies and gaps

8. An initial mapping suggests that adaptive capacity is assessed through a range of sectoral, institutional, and socio-economic indicators, but there is no single standardized methodology. A comprehensive review of approaches, such as those by the IPCC, United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Environment Programme, and academic institutions, would support future AC guidance.

9. Identified gaps include:

- (a) Lack of coherence across levels (national to local);
- (b) Limited methodological adaptation to regional contexts;
- (c) Inadequate attention to governance, participation, and equity dimensions;
- (d) Limited data for dynamic and forward-looking assessments.

III. Options for consideration by the AC

10. The AC is invited to consider the following options for potential activities on adaptive capacity assessment:

1. Technical review and mapping

11. Conduct a desk-based review of adaptive capacity assessment methodologies, tools, and frameworks.

12. Include regional and thematic lenses (e.g., agriculture, health, urban systems) and relevance to the thematic areas of the United Arab Emirates Framework for Global Climate Resilience.

13. Identify good practices and gaps, particularly for developing country contexts.

2. Conceptual clarification and guidance note

14. Develop a concise technical paper or guidance note clarifying the concept, role, and application of adaptive capacity assessments, including illustrative indicators and use cases.

3. Documentation of effective practices

15. Compile case studies demonstrating effective adaptive capacity assessments, including participatory, local-level, and gender-responsive approaches.

Knowledge exchange

16. Organize a targeted webinar (rather than multiple expert meetings), with invited speakers from the IPCC Bureau, the Paris Committee on Capacity-building (PCCB), and other relevant bodies to discuss practical approaches and build shared understanding.

Collaboration with constituted bodies

17. Engage with the LEG, the CGE, the PCCB, and the Nairobi work programme (NWP) to align efforts, particularly building on:

- (a) Ongoing work of the AC in collaboration with the CGE and the LEG in the context of decision 2/CMA.5, paragraph 44;
- (b) PCCB's 2023 focus area on capacity gaps;
- (c) Submissions and technical papers developed by the broader UNFCCC community.

IV. Possible next steps

18. To operationalize work on adaptive capacity assessment in a resource-efficient and targeted manner, the AC may wish to consider any of the following options and next steps:

<i>Step</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Timeline</i>
1. Agreement on scope	AC 28 to confirm thematic scope, objectives, and initial activities	AC 28
2. High-level webinar	Organize a single knowledge-sharing session with key partners (e.g., IPCC, PCCB)	Q4 2025
3. Technical mapping report	Commission or conduct a desk review of existing methodologies and practices	Q1 2026
4. Guidance on a concept note	Draft a concept note with conceptual and practical elements	By AC 29
5. Coordination with partners	Liaise with LEG, PCCB, NWP, and relevant regional networks to identify synergies	Ongoing
6. Consider technical workshop (optional)	Explore feasibility of one regional or thematic technical workshop in 2026	To be determined

Documentation information

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0.1.0	28 August 2025	AC 28 This concept note including possible next steps is for consideration by the AC.
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