UNDRR United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction

ADAPTATION COMMITTEE

Adaptive capacity assessment

Input by UNDRR, 4 September 2026

Guiding questions

1. Does your body/entity use or apply the concept of adaptive capacity in its work? If yes, please briefly indicate in which activities or products.
2. How does your body/entity define or understand adaptive capacity? Please provide the definition used, if any.
3. Does your work include any methodology, approach, tool or indicators for assessing adaptive capacity? If yes, please briefly describe it or provide a link to the relevant resource.

1. Application of the concept of adaptive capacity

The United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) incorporates adaptive capacity as a core concept within its broader disaster risk reduction (DRR) framework, particularly in relation to resilience-building, risk assessment, and the implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030. The Sendai Framework defined "disaster risk" as a function of hazard, exposure, vulnerability and **capacity** and can be elaborated as:

- *Dynamic and forward-looking*: Adaptive capacity is treated as distinct from "coping capacity", which focuses on managing and surviving immediate shocks. Adaptive capacity is treated as longer-term adjustment rather than immediate crisis response - the Sendai Framework's emphasis on understanding risk, preventing new risk creation, and strengthening resilience supports this longer-term orientation.
- *Multi-scalar*: Applies across individuals, communities, institutions, and even ecological systems ("other organisms"), reflecting linkages to climate change adaptation and ecosystem-based approaches. Further, in DRR domain, adaptive capacity is not merely present at multiple scales but also depends on the interactions between those scales, such as national policies enabling local adaptation.
- *Resilience-oriented*: Adaptive capacity is generally treated as one of the core components of resilience, alongside absorptive/coping capacity and transformative capacity — a framing UNDRR shares with related bodies like IPCC and development/humanitarian agencies. The Sendai Framework's overarching objective of preventing new risk, reducing existing risk, and strengthening resilience is consistent with this.

2. *Terminology*

In 2017, the UN General Assembly adopted a report developed by the Open-ended Intergovernmental Expert Working Group on Indicators and Terminology (OIEWG) relating to disaster risk reduction. The report contained a set of indicators to measure progress in Sendai Framework together with associated terminologies.

While these terminologies do not explicitly define "adaptive capacity" it defines:

- ***Capacity*** as the combination of all the strengths, attributes and resources available within an organization, community or society to manage and reduce disaster risks and strengthen resilience. Capacity may include infrastructure, institutions, human knowledge and skills, and collective attributes such as social relationships, leadership and management.
- ***Coping capacity*** as the ability of people, organizations and systems, using available skills and resources, to manage adverse conditions, risk or disasters. The capacity to cope requires continuing awareness, resources and good management, both in normal times as well as during disasters or adverse conditions. Coping capacities contribute to the reduction of disaster risks.

3. Assessing adaptive capacity

UNDRR does not explicitly assess adaptive capacity but based on the definition of 'capacity' as outlined above, has developed a suite of tools and guidelines on capacity assessment. Some indicative examples include:

(i) Comprehensive Risk Management (CRM) approach and the UNDRR Strategic Framework 2026-2030 (Objective 2.1): Acts as an overarching approach which emphasizes adaptive capacity in bridging disaster risk reduction and climate action agendas, supporting governments to implement multi-hazard disaster and climate risk governance frameworks (https://www.undrr.org/crm).

(ii) *Disaster Resilience Scorecard for Cities* helps local governments assess their capacity to adapt to disaster risks, including climate-related hazards. Within this, the Climate Resilience Addendum allows users to self-assess the interlinkage and integration of disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation at the sub-national government level strategies and practices.

(iii) *Recovery readiness framework and assessment tool* provides governments with a practical approach to assess their readiness across four domains – governance, finance, capacity, and data and knowledge.

(iv) *Resilience Maturity Assessment* (ReMA) tool provides a comprehensive self-assessment framework designed to evaluate and enhance an enterprise's capacity to withstand disruptions and adapt to change.

(v) *DELTA Resilience:* A next-generation, open-source disaster tracking system (co-developed by UNDRR, UNDP, and WMO) is available for governments to record hazardous events and disaggregate human, economic, and non-economic losses at local and subnational scales. By capturing granular impact data and shifting baselines over time, DELTA Resilience serves as an operational platform to monitor changing adaptive capacities, inform risk-informed development, and support evidence-based adaptation planning

(vi) *Sendai Framework Monitor (SFM):* The official online reporting platform tracking progress against the seven Sendai Framework global targets and their 38 indicators. Targets E (national/local strategies), F (international cooperation and technology transfer), and G (multi-hazard early warning systems) function as indirect indicators tracking the growth of institutional, technical, and adaptive capacities across member states.

(vii) *Global Assessment Report (GAR):* A biennial publications provide conceptual discussions on adaptive capacity regarding systemic risk, complexity, and resilience, serving as analytical and narrative resources rather than scored methodologies or indicator tools, with the GAR 2022: Our World at Risk report specifically addressing adaptive governance and capacity within the context of systemic risk.

UNDRR also coordinated the development of a Strategic approach to capacity development for implementation of the Sendai Framework that defines and characterizes capacity development needs in light of common obstacles and constraints, presenting key principles, elements, and actions that together help guide planning discussions. This is complemented by the Words intro Action series of guidelines that provide practical, specific advice on implementing a people-centered approach to disaster risk reduction.