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Promoting Effective Usage of the Belém Adaptation Indicators

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Highlights

The Belém Adaptation Indicators have strong potential to improve global assessment of climate adaptation. Policymakers must ensure that the indicators serve as a learning tool to accelerate adaptation efforts rather than a reporting burden that distorts national priorities. Future negotiations and technical processes should refine the indicators based on empirical data and pilot application to serve as a robust, long-term tool for assessing the 11 targets under the global goal on adaptation.

Recommendations:

- Prioritize refining the indicators into an effective assessment tool in future negotiations and related technical workstreams.
- Refine the indicators, along with their metadata and methodologies, based on experiences gained from testing them.
- Combine indicators with qualitative information on good practices and pursue assessment approaches that integrate with those of other sustainable development policy agendas.

The Belém Adaptation Indicators

The Paris Agreement on climate change includes the global goal on adaptation (GGA), a collective agreement to increase adaptation efforts (UNFCCC 2016). Assessing progress toward meeting the GGA has been challenging (Adaptation Committee 2021). Recent negotiations have pursued agreement on adaptation targets and indicators to facilitate objective tracking of progress. Although the negotiation process has encountered both methodological and political difficulties (Craft & Fisher 2018; Leiter 2022; Fisher 2024), the Conference of the Parties to the Paris Agreement (CMA) has produced several key outcomes. The first was the UAE Framework for Global Climate Resilience, which involves 11 thematic and dimensional adaptation targets (UNFCCC 2024). The Parties subsequently adopted 59 indicators as the Belém Adaptation Indicators at the 2025 UN Climate Change Conference (CMA 7), the first internationally agreed set of adaptation indicators (UNFCCC 2025). In response to this landmark decision, this policy brief discusses how the indicators can be used effectively to advance global adaptation efforts and identifies key issues to address in future negotiations.

Purposes and Limitations

The primary objective of the indicators is to assess global progress on the 11 targets of the UAE Framework under the GGA. The promotion of monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) within national adaptation efforts using these indicators is an integral secondary function. In fact, within the UAE Framework, MEL is positioned as an independent target that is part of the adaptation policy cycle (UNFCCC 2024, para. 10 (d)). The MEL target stipulates that countries develop and operate national adaptation MEL systems — it focuses on iterative country-led policy processes rather than global tracking. In this way, the indicators serve dual functions: providing visibility into global progress and enhancing national MEL. If properly implemented, they can become an effective compass for accelerating global climate resilience (Leiter & Pringle 2018).

These dual functions, however, may misguide policymakers in using the indicators. Caution is needed to avoid misdirecting adaptation efforts or progress assessments. For instance, in adaptation planning, the Parties are not required to exclusively use the Belém Adaptation Indicators; they may adopt other adaptation indicators that suit their national adaptation plans and policies. The UAE framework introduces its targets with the reservation "inter alia," indicating that the thematic areas for adaptation are not limited to those listed (UNFCCC 2024, para. 9). It also underscores that the targets and indicators are not a basis for comparing the Parties (UNFCCC 2024, para. 11). To prevent the indicators from exerting strong normative influence over adaptation policymaking (Fisher 2024), including funding decisions, the principle of country-driven adaptation should be maintained.

There is a risk that the 59 adopted indicators remain impractical in the absence of clear methodologies, failing to achieve either their primary or secondary purposes. This risk arguably stems from a fundamental misalignment of expectations in the negotiation process. As Falzon observes, "developing countries often called for indicators to track the provision of means of implementation (MoI), while developed countries generally pushed for indicators to track national adaptation progress" (Falzon 2024). Indeed, MoI — finance, technology transfer and capacity building — have been a crunch issue in adaptation negotiations. This tension reflects a deeper divide between those seeking to quantify resource gaps and those prioritizing a process-oriented approach to align with the iterative nature of country-driven adaptation. As these divergent views were not fully reconciled at COP30, the resulting Belém Adaptation Indicators reflect a complex integration of competing priorities. Consequently, as reflected in the concerns raised by negotiating groups such as the Alliance of Small Island States and the European Union (AOSIS 2026; EU 2026), the current set of indicators faces significant structural challenges. There is a risk that it may fail to fulfill even the primary purpose of collective global progress tracking, let alone the secondary function of enhancing national MEL systems.

State of Future Negotiations

The Belém Adaptation Indicators should not be considered a final product; they require further refinement. Parties should allow such refinement based on country experiences and testing. In doing so, it is necessary to bear in mind both the future negotiation trajectory and policy needs. The main negotiation track to oversee a refinement will be the two-year Belém–Addis Vision on Adaptation (UNFCCC 2025, para. 21), into which the Parties can feed insights and lessons learned from the use of the indicators. Parties are encouraged to test the indicators (UNFCCC 2025, para. 11) and are provided with flexibility to disaggregate them according to national contexts (UNFCCC 2025, Annex para. 1). In addition, the viability of the indicators is being tested against acute policy needs for integrated solutions towards sustainability (Patterson et al. 2017). Indeed, the UAE framework urged the Parties to pursue targets "in alignment with other global frameworks" (UNFCCC 2024, para. 9). Such frameworks include the SDGs, the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework under the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030. Effective use of the indicators to promote such integrated solutions is another challenge.

Looking ahead, the process of future negotiations can also be improved. In Belém, late-stage consultations by the COP Presidency with selected groups, whose content and outcomes were adopted without being shared at the negotiating table, caused dissatisfaction among many Parties (Carbon Brief 2025). This underscores the need for transparency — a lack of clarity undermines the fairness of the multilateral process. Furthermore, negotiations should be more efficient. It is crucial to strengthen the coordinated leadership of the subsidiary body (SB) chairs and the COP Presidency under UNFCCC, while integrating lessons learned from past negotiations. For instance, the SB chairs should utilize Parties' submissions systematically, streamline negotiations and coordinate technical activities efficiently, including those by the proposed taskforce. An improved negotiation process is crucial to enable better global assessment of adaptation through the second global stocktake (GST2) in 2028 and beyond.

Policy Recommendations

1. Future negotiations and technical processes should improve the indicators, establishing them as an effective assessment tool through work under the Belém–Addis Vision on Adaptation. Piloting and experimenting with the indicators will provide valuable inputs for such processes. Each Party can collect valuable information by piloting and experimenting with the indicators, assessing whether they can be operationalized within existing national and international data infrastructures and reporting capacities. In doing so, each country should be mindful of potential silos within its policy process. In some countries, those leading negotiations are not necessarily in charge of the relevant domestic policymaking. Those with a good understanding of the rationale behind the indicators should strive to ensure that the indicators are used appropriately in the national context. In other countries, negotiators can also be national adaptation focal points, but they often have limited reach into other sectoral ministries. Countries should also strengthen intra-governmental coordination between climate change ministries, sector-specific ministries and national statistical offices to initiate phased piloting, starting with feasible indicators.

Information collected from such domestic processes will help to ensure that negotiations are rooted in practical experience and sound evidence. It will enable the identification of technical improvements under the Belém–Addis Vision that reflect on-the-ground realities. For instance, the proposed technical taskforce and relevant constituted bodies can further refine the indicator list, metadata and methodologies through analysis of these inputs from Parties' experience (UNFCCC 2025). Specifically, the UNFCCC Secretariat and relevant bodies such as the Adaptation Committee could synthesize the results of these pilot operations into information that contributes to GST2 in 2028, establishing a mechanism that enables effective adaptation assessment while reducing the reporting burden on developing countries.

2. The Belém Adaptation Indicators and their metadata and methodologies should be informed by experiences gained from testing the indicators. In doing so, qualitative and quantitative analyses are equally important. The indicators can promote mutual learning among Parties and relevant stakeholders across diverse adaptation challenges. In using indicators for tracking adaptation progress globally, the Parties should equally value quantitative and qualitative assessment of progress. Quantifying social phenomena inevitably strips them of context and meaning (Merry 2016), and qualitative information will help to fill such gaps. The Belém Adaptation Indicators comprise both quantitative and qualitative indicators. The question is how much those indicators will help to raise countries' ambition through the GST (Milkoreit & Haapala 2019; Zahar 2019). Qualitative insights, such as good practices, will be valuable in enhancing mutual learning. Countries should therefore report good practices in addition to information on the Belém Adaptation Indicators, for instance in their Biennial Transparency Reports.

3. Adaptation policymakers, along with relevant stakeholders in broader sustainable development efforts, should use adaptation indicators in conjunction with the goals, targets and indicators of other development and sustainability agendas to pursue integrative approaches. Adaptation is part of broader development efforts to reduce vulnerability and build resilience (Schipper 2006; Schipper et al. 2020). Adaptation policymakers should use the indicators to pursue an integrated approach to sustainable development, including cross-sectoral approaches to implementation and reporting for multiple sustainability frameworks. Practical steps include communicating adaptation indicators to those leading on other sustainability agendas, thereby identifying effective linkages and potential trade-offs. The adaptation indicators are expected to inform and inspire actors engaged in sustainable development in general. Such actors can use the indicators to assess whether their activities align with adaptation goals under the Paris Agreement. Adaptation policymakers should support the diffusion of the indicators through guidelines, capacity building and knowledge products. Donors and financial institutions should refer to adaptation indicators in their operational processes and environmental standards. Through such concerted efforts by diverse actors, the Belém Adaptation Indicators will help to bridge approaches across governments, development organizations and the private sector.

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