## Governance to respond to climatic impacts:

# **Evaluating the Paris adaptation outcomes for policy and practice** Sönke Kreft\* Sven Harmeling\*\*

## **Problem statement**

**Climate change impacts** are today's reality. The necessity for private and public actors to adapt to these impacts forms the demand to purposefully steer adaptation responses through adaptation governance. The central mechanism for international governance on adaptation is the **United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)**, which includes national and international adaptation obligations and facilitative mechanisms. The UNFCCC is the major international cooperation architecture with obligations by states to initiate, plan, conduct and communicate adaptation actions, with norms on adaptation conduct ('principles of adaptation') and with obligations for developed countries to assist developing countries in meeting their adaptation needs. However, policy processes and decisions in the UNFCCC so far only have limited bearing to science-practice debates. This is evident by analyzing the Summary for Policymakers of Working Group 2 of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). Despite synthesizing the body of research on impacts, vulnerabilities and respective responses, the IPCC SPM does not include one reference to the international adaptation governance regime of the UNFCCC. International norms on adaptation conduct as formulated in the **Cancun Adaptation Framework** of 2010 only receive a peripheral reference in Chapter 16 of WG 2. In terms of practice, only a few operational documents of climate funds refer specifically to global adaptation principles (Kreft & Harmeling, forthcoming).

The **Paris Climate Agreement** represents a watershed moment for international cooperation on climate change policy and encompasses a substantive section on adaptation commitments. This contribution highlights the **evolution of the UNFCCC adaptation governance regime**, its mechanics and change mechanisms and aims to answer the question to what extent Paris provides qualitative changes to the existing UNFCCC adaptation process and whether it will improve its **regime influence**.



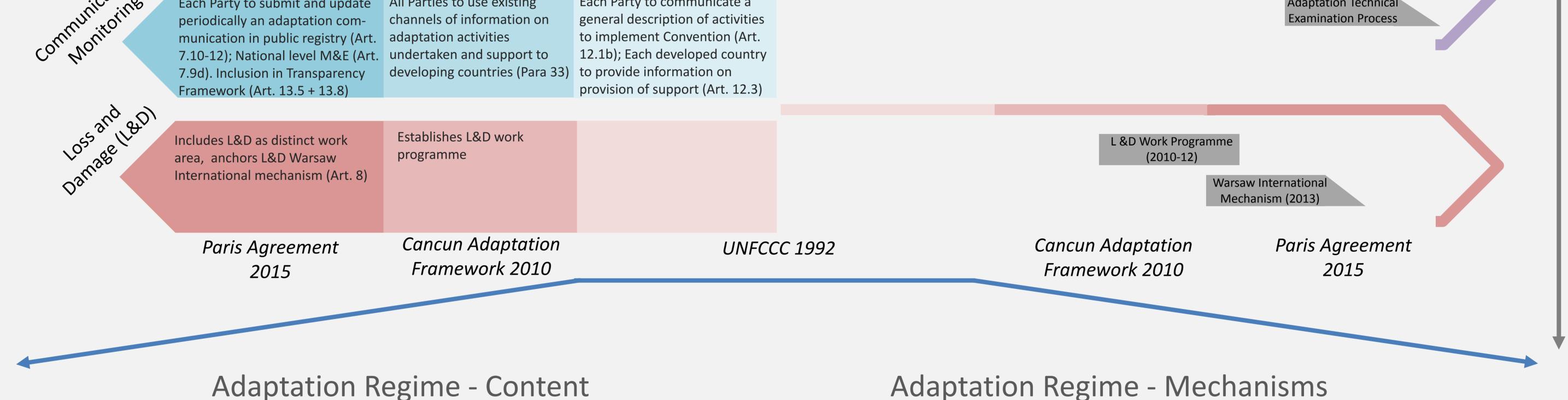




nstitution

Expansion

vision	Includes adaptation in core objectives (Art. 2.1b) and establishes Global Goal on Adaptation (Art. 7.1); progress part of regular Global Stocktake (Art. 7.14)	Adaptation mentioned as part of overall vision of Cancun Agreement; aiming at reducing vulnerability and build resilience in developing countries (Para 11)		SBI/SBSTA Adaptation related agenda items Adaptation Committee (2010)
oncepts	Establishes Global Goal on Adaptation (Art. 7.1) and recognises global challenge for all (7.2), links to mitigation efforts (Art. 7.4); outline of key activities (7.9)	Adaptation as challenge for all countries (Para 11); Outline of key adaptation activities (Para 14)	adaptation context (Art. 4.14)	National Adaptation Plans/INDCs (2010) Building Consultative Group of Experts (1999)
insonduct onduct	Adaptation principles of good practice incorporated and advanced (Art. 7.5)	Adaptation principles of good practice incorporated (Para 12)		Least Developed Country Expert Group (2001)
national obligation	Recognition of importance of international cooperation and to strengthen this (Art. 7.6+7.7); Developed countries continuing UNFCCC commitments, others to add resources (Art. 9.1+9.2)	Agreement that cooperation is urgently required (Para 11) Developed countries requested to provide support (Para 18)	All Parties to cooperate in preparing for adaptation (Art. 4.1e); Developed countries to provide resouces/assist in meeting adaptation costs (Art. 4.3+4.4)	Least Developed Country Fund/Special Climate Change Fund (2001) Adaptation Fund (2007)
ational on obligation obligation	Obligation for each party to undertake adaptation planning and implementation (Art. 7.9)	<i>Invitation</i> to Parties to engage in adaptation action (Para 14) National Adaptation Plans process initiated (Para 15/16)	All Parties shall undertake measures to facilitate adaptation (Art. 4.1b)	Green Climate Fund (2010) Motivation Nairobi Work Programme (2006)
nication/	Each Party to submit and update	All Parties to use existing	Each Party to communicate a	Adaptation Technical



## Fig. 1: Evolution of the UNFCCC Adaptation Regime - Showing regime expansion and mechanisms. Own illustration.

#### Description

We take a **process tracking perspective** on adaptation related UNFCCC decisions to highlight the **adaptation regime expansion**, that occurred since the foundation of the UNFCCC. Important milestones include the **UNFCCC** itself, but also the **Cancun Adaptation Framework** - the first comprehensive adaptation specific policy postulation decided by world governments in 2010 - and the outcome of the **Paris climate conference** in 2015. We use part of the analytical framework developed by Karlsson-Vinkhuyzen & Vihma (2009) to discuss the role of different adaptation related processes and institutions in providing **regime effectiveness mechanisms**. They differentiate between **capacity creating** (political and technical) and **motivation creating mechanisms**, which include (financial) reward and pull of legitimacy in countries following conduct through an organized web of dialogue.

## **Observation/Discussions/Conclusions**

The UNFCCC adaptation regime underwent a considerable **regime expansion** in the last years, reflecting growing societal awareness on the issue of climate adaptation. The Paris Agreement provides a qualitative leap in the sense that it streamlines different aspects of international adaptation governance into one article. It shows growing details and in comparison to the UNFCCC puts greater emphasis on framing adaptation as a **challenge for all countries** and putting more onus on **national government** in pursuing adaptation efforts. Also in terms of UNFCCC adaptation institutions a considerable expansion took place. Here the Paris climate summit did not launch new processes (with exception of adding the adaptation perspective to a workstream that enhances action prior to 2020) but decided that the existing institutional set-up serves the Agreement. From the perspective of regime influence, these processes seem to **cover all relevant effectiveness mechanisms**. However, through both an **institutional review in 2017** and the **future global stocktake**, which synchronizes future policy cycles of the UNFCCC, it will have to be evaluated whether the UNFCCC adaptation institutions are really fit for purpose. Implementing the Paris Agreement and continuing relevant follow-up through the UNFCCC process will determine whether the countries will deliver on their promises, and whether as a regime it bears more influence into other policy and practices.

This provides the backdrop for us to give indications about the state of adaptation governance after the Paris climate summit.

## References

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