

Governance to respond to climatic impacts:

Evaluating the Paris adaptation outcomes for policy and practice

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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**.

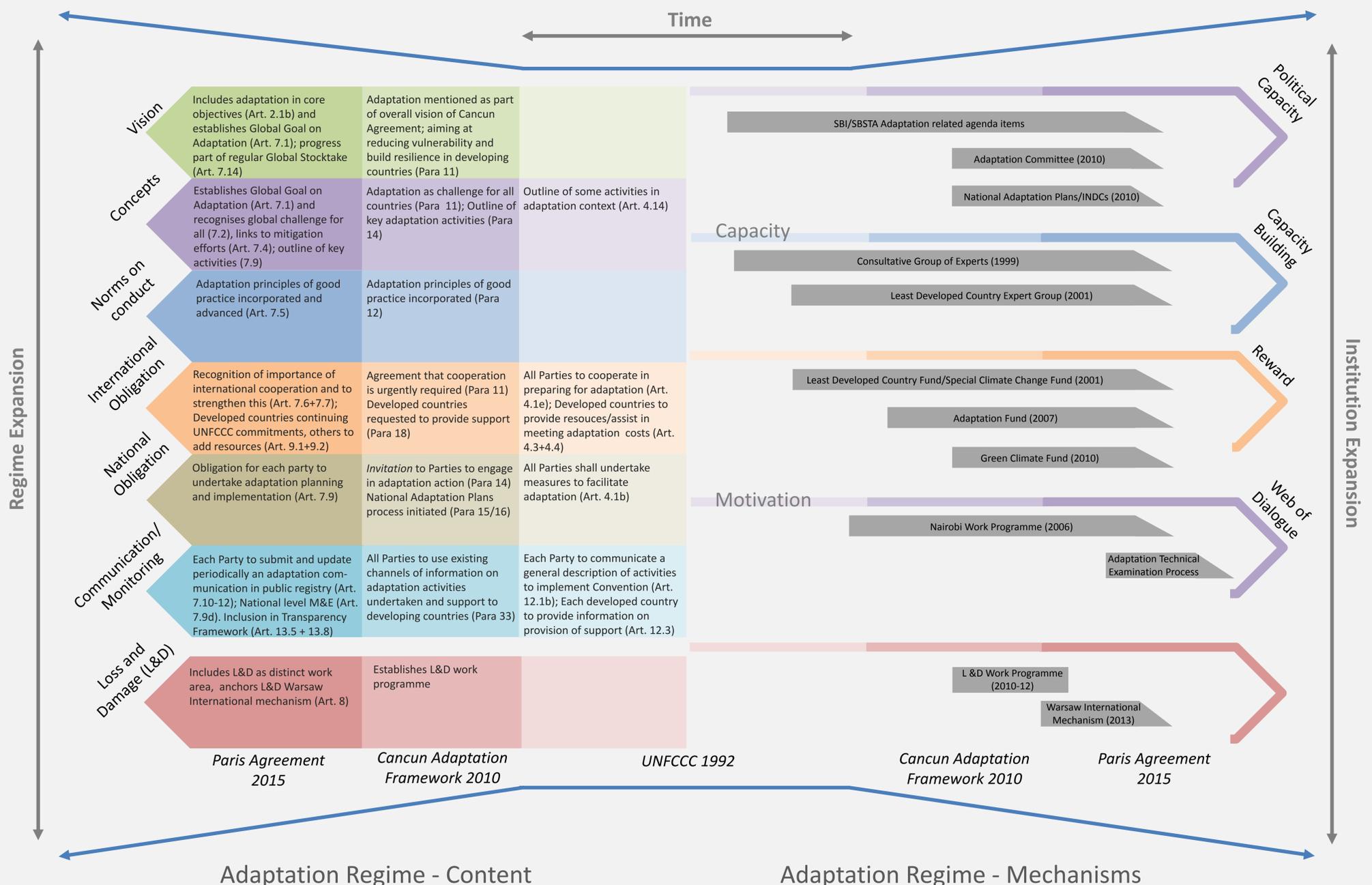


Fig. 1: Evolution of the UNFCCC Adaptation Regime - Showing regime expansion and mechanisms. Own illustration.

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

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.

References

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