



IC12 Institutions for Adaptation: Are Dutch Institutions Capable of Adapting to Climate Change?

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Objective

Climate change calls for institutions that promote the adaptive capacity of society and allow society to modify its institutions at a rate commensurate with the rapid rate of environmental change. Institutions, traditionally conservative and reactive, will now have to be designed in a way that they support social actors to proactively respond through planned processes and deliberate steps but also through cherishing and encouraging spontaneous and autonomous change that is rapid enough to deal with the impacts, as well as allow for institutional redesign. This poster addresses the question: How can the inherent characteristics of institutions to stimulate the adaptive capacity of society to climate change from local through to national level be assessed?

Definition of adaptive capacity

We define adaptive capacity as the inherent characteristics of institutions that empower social actors to respond to short and long-term measures either through planned measures or through allowing and encouraging creative responses from society both ex ante and ex post. It encompasses:

- The characteristics of institutions (formal and informal; rules, norms and beliefs) that enables society (individuals, organizations and networks) to cope with climate change, and
- The degree to which such institutions allow and encourage actors to change these institutions to cope with climate change.
- This implies that institutions should allow actors to learn from new insights and experiences in order to flexibly and creatively 'manage' the expected and the unexpected, while maintaining a degree of identity.

Limits of the approach

However, there are three tensions in the proposal - the emphasis on variety may not be able to rapidly cope with climate change; these criteria are not easily measurable such as criteria like GDP per capita; further, the simple colour range of the score card (red, yellow, green) may not be universally applicable.

In the actual assessment process, we first need social actors apply the concepts; second, we will engage with them to understand what the challenges are in applying such criteria; third, we will assess whether they agree or disagree with the use of such criteria. In doing so, we will assess if there is any causal relationship between the individual criteria – for example does variety stimulate learning? Such assessments will help refine the criteria and sub-criteria.

Criteria for adaptive capacity

On the basis of a literature review and brainstorm sessions, six criteria for measuring adaptive capacity have been identified:

1. Variety: Whether institutions encourage a diversity of problem definitions and solutions
2. Learning capacity: Whether institutions encourage actors to learn
3. Space for planned and innovative autonomous action: Whether institutions provide actors room for both planned and unplanned action.
4. Leadership; Whether institutions give actors the opportunities to take the lead
5. Availability of resources: Whether institutions have available resources
6. Fair governance: Whether institutions allow for fair systems of governance

The adaptive capacity score card

Together these six criteria form the Scorecard for Adaptive Capacity. This card can help academics and social actors to assess the inherent characteristics of institutions to stimulate the adaptive capacity of society to respond to climate change; and to focus on whether and how institutions need to be redesigned.

