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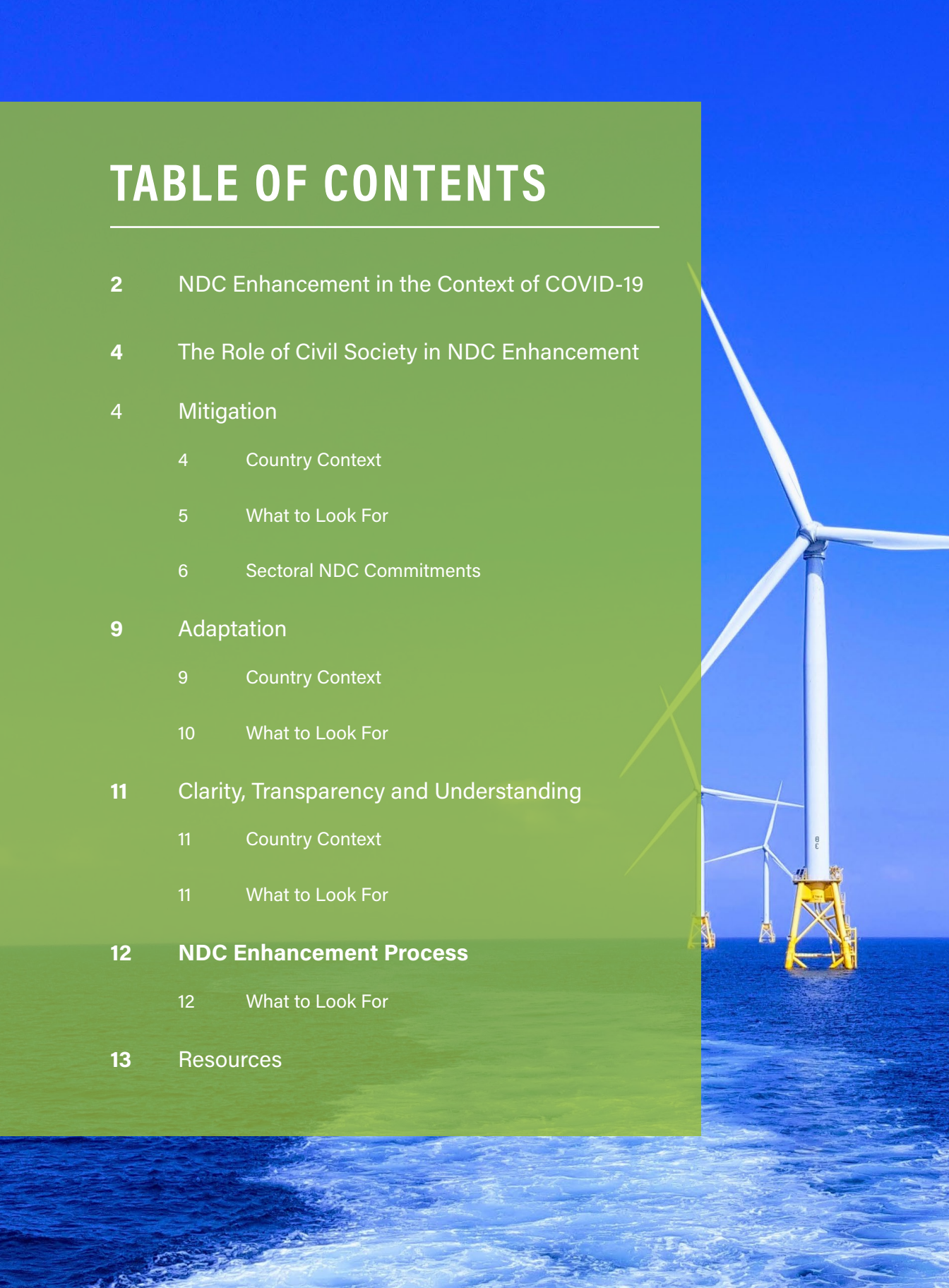
# A Brief Guide For Reviewing Countries' New and Updated NDCs



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To set the course for a net-zero emissions future, the Paris Agreement established a goal of limiting warming to well below 2 degrees C, and pursuing efforts to limit it to 1.5 degrees C. The 2018 IPCC report laid bare the risks of exceeding 1.5 degrees C, yet the first national pledges made in Paris were not sufficient to limit warming to even 2 degrees C. The Agreement set up a mechanism to enhance ambition for climate action over time, requiring each country to prepare and communicate nationally determined contributions (NDCs) every five years to reflect its highest possible ambition. In line with these five-year cycles and what nations agreed upon at Paris, countries are now preparing to submit enhanced NDCs in the lead-up to COP26 in November 2021.

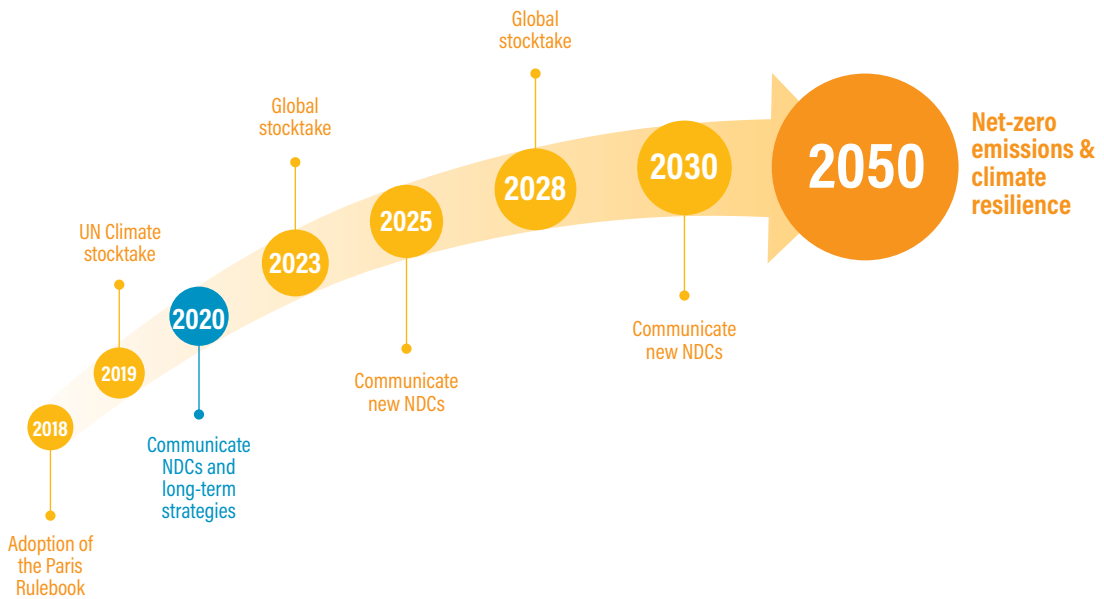
Find up-to-date data on submitted NDCs with the Climate Watch NDC Explorer, [available here](#).

# NDC ENHANCEMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic casts these efforts in a new light. The pandemic has highlighted societal fragility and systemic injustices, and has focused government attention around the world on near-term economic recovery. The manner in which governments pursue this end — whether by doubling down on fossil-intensive infrastructure or investing in a clean, green recovery that enhances resilience — will have major implications not only for Paris Agreement goals, but also for other indicators of sustainability and human well-being. To the extent that governments prioritize green recovery measures, such measures can serve to

kick-start transitions in key sectors towards halving global emissions by 2030 (see Box 1). Yet beyond these synergies with economic recovery, enhanced NDCs still play a critical role in advancing climate action. NDCs — coupled with the long-term, low-GHG emissions development strategies also invited under the Paris Agreement — have the unique potential to chart a longer-term direction of travel, create a policy context to steer investments, attract climate finance and strengthen multilateralism. Moreover, NDCs are subject to reporting requirements under the Paris Agreement to keep countries accountable.

**FIGURE 1 |** Enhancing ambition under the Paris agreement



Source: Fransen et al. 2017

## BOX 1 | BUILDING BACK BETTER TOWARDS ENHANCED NDCS

Smart investments in key sectors can stimulate near-term economic recovery, help set the economy on a trajectory to limit warming and improve climate resilience over the longer term. Examples include:

### KEY SECTORS

**Power:** Stimulus measures can expand renewable energy capacity — including distributing renewable energy that can broaden energy access and enhance resilience, modernizing the grid and boosting energy efficiency in buildings, industry and transport. These measures can accelerate progress towards zero-carbon energy and GHG targets reflected in enhanced NDCs.

**Transport:** Stimulus measures can accelerate the manufacturing, purchasing and use of electric vehicles; step up widespread smart charging infrastructure; and build up infrastructure to support public transit, walking and cycling. NDCs can reflect targets for clean transport, modal shifts and related GHG targets.

**Food Systems:** Recovery-related investments in measures to improve agricultural productivity, reduce food loss and waste and protect small, vulnerable farms and farmers can help secure food supplies while reducing emissions. Likewise, careful design of incentive structures and finance flows can help facilitate equitable benefit sharing, while safeguard measures and rights-based approaches can help minimize harms. Enhanced NDCs can reflect these measures and related targets.

**Forests:** Many countries already include nature-based solutions such as forest conservation, protection and management in their NDCs, but current stimulus packages provide an opportunity to further enhance commitments while building back better. For example, restoring 160 million hectares of degraded agricultural land could generate \$84 billion in annual economic benefits. Conservation of natural areas can also provide significant near-term economic benefits while contributing to climate resiliency and increased biodiversity. These interventions can both advance progress towards existing commitments and enable governments to commit to more ambitious goals in their next NDCs.

Similar opportunities exist in additional sectors such as **buildings** (see Resources) and **industry**.

### CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES

**Short-lived Climate Pollutants (SLCPs):** The outcomes achieved through reducing SLCPs (methane, black carbon, hydrofluorocarbons and ground-level ozone) — which cut across all the above-mentioned sectors — are relevant to many economic recovery goals. These goals include creating lasting economic benefits, protecting human health, reducing poverty and inequality, improving agricultural productivity and deploying readily available, cost-effective solutions.

**Adaptation and Resilience:** While climate resilience can weave throughout sectoral actions — both in COVID-19 recovery and NDCs — and synergize with mitigation in many cases, it is also essential to take proactive, specific steps to build climate resilience and adaptation into recovery strategies and enhanced NDCs. Adaptation investments have benefit-cost ratios ranging from 2:1 to 10:1, and adaptation often creates more jobs per dollar spent than more traditional investment.

Climate adaptation investments can also pair with efforts to increase resilience involving health systems, employment, livelihoods and housing. This especially applies to COVID-19 recovery, but also applies to broader adaptation strategies in NDCs.

## THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN NDC ENHANCEMENT

As countries design enhanced NDCs and recovery packages, it will be crucial to put people first when defining priorities for action. Social dialogue, meaningful stakeholder engagement and community inclusion are critical aspects of this effort. Civil society and local communities have a wealth of experience on issues ranging from social justice to energy access to nature-based solutions. Civil society therefore has critical roles to play in enhancing NDCs; generating, critiquing and refining ideas; and holding governments to account. NDCs, in turn, can serve as an important vehicle to advance a wide range of civil society priorities — not only raising the ambition of climate action, but doing so in a way that helps address poverty, well-being, equity, food security, biodiversity conservation and many other ends.

Many governments hold formal stakeholder consultations on NDC enhancement in which civil society can participate. Outside of these formal processes, civil society groups can also organize and advocate, engaging governments in a dialogue to share their views and reflect their priorities in enhanced NDCs.

The purpose of this document is to assist civil society stakeholders in analyzing the updated and enhanced NDCs submitted by countries in the lead-up to COP26. It focuses on the key dimensions of the NDCs: mitigation, adaptation, transparency and process. The sections for each dimension will explain what it is, why it is important, how to determine its relevance for a country, what to look for in an enhanced NDC and (where relevant) how it applies in particular sectors. This document provides a high-level summary; see Resources for further details.

## MITIGATION

Enhanced mitigation ambition means that the enhanced NDC, if fully implemented, results in lower cumulative greenhouse gas emissions than the fully implemented initial NDC. The baseline for determining this is the complete set of mitigation target(s) and action(s) articulated in the original NDC. In determining the effect on mitigation ambition, it is important to consider the cumulative impact of all changes to the NDC, including the extent to which they overlap with each other, as well as the targets, policies and measures in the existing NDC.

### Country Context

All countries should ensure that the mitigation contributions in their NDCs reflect their “highest possible ambition” as stipulated in Article 4.3 of the Paris Agreement. As a benchmark, global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in 2030 fall by around half relative to 2010 levels — accompanied by steep declines in non-CO<sub>2</sub> emissions — in scenarios consistent with achieving the Paris Agreement goal of limiting warming to 1.5 degrees C. However, there is not an expectation that all countries mirror this decline in their NDC targets. The Paris Agreement acknowledges that NDCs will reflect “common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities” in light of “different national circumstances,” while leaving these concepts open to interpretation.

When reviewing mitigation ambition in a country context, consider the following:

- How ambitious was the initial NDC? (See, for example, the Climate Action Tracker.)
- To what extent, if any, does the new or updated NDC enhance mitigation ambition? (See “What to Look For” below.)

- Is the country’s “highest possible ambition” reflected?
- Is the level of ambition appropriate and equitable considering the country’s responsibilities, capabilities and national circumstances? Considerations related to equity may include historical emissions, annual emissions per capita and cumulative emissions per capita, as well as factors related to capability (including human development; resilience to climate impacts; and economic, governance, technical and innovation capacity).

## What to Look For

The following factors can be considered in assessing the mitigation component of an NDC:

### Enhancing Mitigation Ambition

- What are the projected future emissions under the new/updated and the original NDCs, if provided? Are these figures comparable (i.e. are they based on the same methodology)? If so, are emission projections lower under the new/updated NDC than under the original NDC?
- If future emission projections are not available, do the original and new/updated NDCs contain a single mitigation commitment (e.g. a top-line GHG mitigation target)? If so, does the new/updated NDC strengthen that mitigation commitment?
- Do the original and new/updated NDCs contain multiple, non-overlapping mitigation commitments (e.g. a renewable energy commitment and a deforestation commitment)? If so, does the new/updated NDC strengthen one or more of those commitments and/or have additional non-overlapping commitments? (If the original or new/updated NDCs contain multiple, over-

lapping mitigation commitments, further analysis may be necessary to determine the impact on mitigation ambition. See the GHG Protocol Mitigation Goal Standard and Policy and Action Standard for methodological details.)

### Improving Paris Agreement Alignment

- Does the NDC as a whole, and its treatment of individual sectors, lead to a trajectory that aligns with the benchmarks for achieving Paris Agreement temperature goals?

### Reflecting New Developments, Innovation and Best Practices

- Does the treatment of the sector in the initial NDC reflect up-to-date assumptions regarding available technologies and their costs?
- Does the NDC as a whole, and its treatment of individual sectors, reflect the relevant plans, policies and measures that are being implemented and considered at the national level, or should be considered based on available best practices?
- Does the NDC as a whole, and its treatment of individual sectors, reflect the relevant climate action commitments made by nonstate and subnational actors in the country?

### Maximizing the Benefits

- Does the NDC as a whole, and its treatment of individual sectors, maximize synergies and reduce potential conflicts with development objectives, including the Sustainable Development Goals and climate resilience?

### Filling Gaps

- Does the NDC address all relevant sectors, subsectors and greenhouse gases?

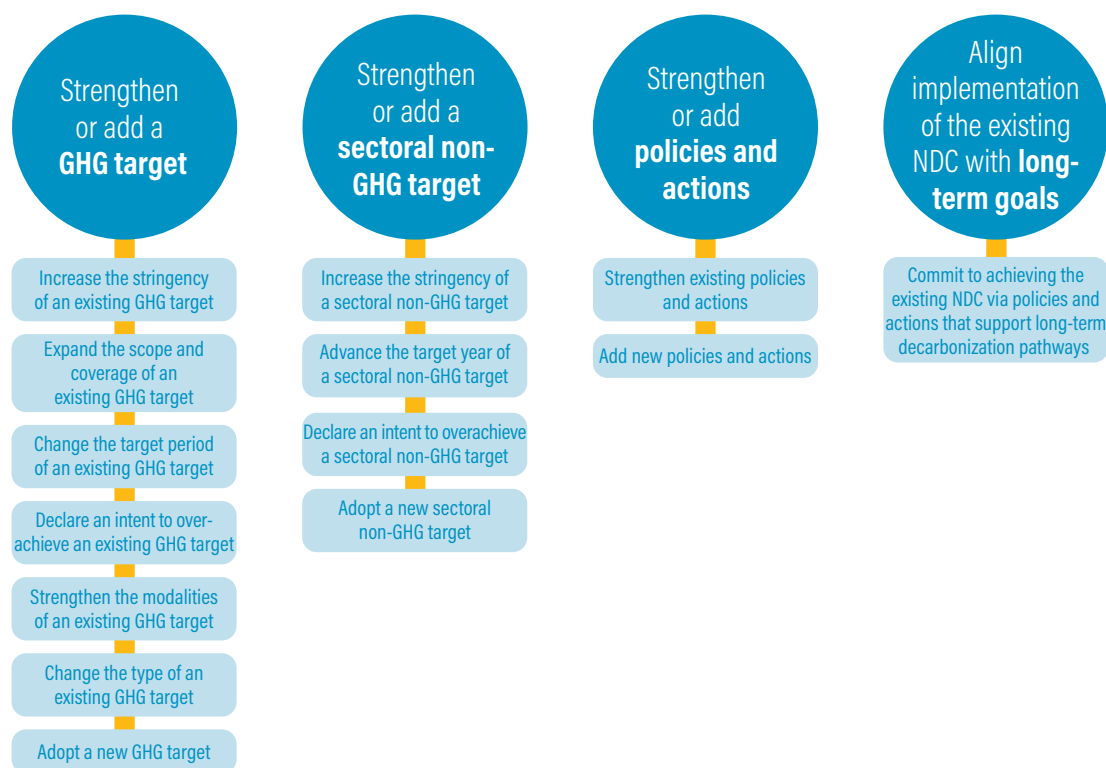
## Addressing Finance and Implementation Issues

- Could the NDC better reflect finance needs for implementing mitigation action and/ or policy action to align finance flows with mitigation goals?
- Does the NDC address important cross-sectoral interactions?
- Could the NDC otherwise facilitate strengthened implementation?

## Sectoral NDC Commitments

Countries are not required to set targets or policies for sectors in their NDCs. In fact, the Paris Agreement stipulates that developed countries should undertake “economy-wide absolute emission reduction targets,” while developing countries “are encouraged to move over time towards economy-wide emission reduction or limitation targets in the light of different national circumstances.” Some countries with economywide targets elect not to

**FIGURE 2 |** Options for enhancing mitigation ambition



Source: Fransen et al. 2017.



include sector-specific targets or policies in their NDCs. The absence of a sectoral target or policy in the NDC does not necessarily mean that the country does not intend action to occur in that sector; the country might specify the sector's role in domestic implementation plans, for example, without spelling this out in the NDC.

Nevertheless, some countries — including those with or without economywide targets — include sector-specific targets in their NDCs. Such targets can provide greater clarity as to how countries will achieve the NDC and can aid in accountability for action in specific sectors. Countries also encourage civil society to consider, given the national context, whether the NDC itself, an implementation plan or other document should express such targets.

Below are indicative examples of potentially meaningful sectoral NDC targets for some key sectors and themes.

#### **Power Commitments in Enhanced NDCs:**

- Economywide GHG targets reflecting more ambitious abatement options in the power sector.
- Ambitious GHG targets for the power sector, such as:
  - A power-sector carbon-intensity target.
  - A coal plant emissions-reduction target.
- Targets to support planning for renewables, such as:
  - Renewable energy targets as a share of total electricity generation mix.
  - Renewable energy targets aligning with longer-term national plans and national cost-effective renewable energy potential.
  - Energy access targets (e.g. through the deployment of decentralized energy solutions).
  - Rooftop solar targets.

- Targets to support grid flexibility, such as:
  - Energy storage targets to support renewable energy deployment.
  - Targets for smart meter deployment and forecasting technologies to predict real-time output of variable renewable energy generation.
- Targets and commitments to address existing fossil fuel assets, such as:
  - Fossil fuel (e.g. coal) phase-out targets for the power sector, coupled with just transition plans.
  - Commitments to no new added traditional fossil-fuel-fired capacity after current project pipeline.
  - Air quality targets related to the power sector.
- Targets to address integration with end-use sectors such as buildings and transport.

#### **Transport Commitments in Enhanced NDCs:**

- Economywide GHG targets reflecting more ambitious abatement options in the transport sector.
- Ambitious GHG targets for the transport sector, such as reducing transport GHG emissions by a certain percentage by 2030 from a base year.
- Non-GHG targets addressing the transport sector, such as:
  - Modal shift targets (e.g., a certain percentage of trips within cities that should happen by walking, cycling or public transit).
  - Targets for kilometers of high-quality public transit (e.g. BRT, LRT, metro).
  - Targets for walking and cycling infrastructure (e.g. kilometers of protected cycling infrastructure, bicycle share systems or standards for inclusion of pedestrian infrastructure).



- Vehicle electrification and alternative fuel targets (passenger and freight, as well as light- and heavy-duty vehicles).
- Electric vehicle charging infrastructure targets.
- Phase-out targets for internal combustion engines.
- Fuel efficiency targets.
- Targets to phase out fossil fuel subsidies, coupled with policies to offset any economic impacts on vulnerable populations.

#### **Forest and Land-use Commitments in Enhanced NDCs:**

- Economywide GHG targets reflecting more ambitious abatement options in the forest and land-use sector.
- Ambitious GHG targets for the forest and land-use sector, such as tons of CO<sub>2</sub>e net emissions reduction from the sector relative to the base year.
- Forest-related targets from other international processes (e.g. the Bonn Challenge or New York Declaration on Forests) or domestic policies.
- Expanded scope of non-GHG targets to include additional forest types (e.g., mangroves and peatlands), types of solutions (e.g., agroforestry and silvo-pastoral systems) and/or geographical areas.

- Non-GHG targets addressing the forest and land-use sector, such as:

- Total area under legal protection, sustainable forest management or forest certification.
- Targets for increasing protection and improving conservation for primary forests.
- Targets for increasing ecosystem restoration with a focus on reconnecting areas of primary forests.
- Total area of mangroves or peatland forests protected or restored.
- Targets to increase area with secured land tenure for indigenous people or local communities.

- Policies and actions for the forest and land-use sector focusing on improved forest governance and community forest management.

#### **Agriculture Commitments in Enhanced NDCs:**

- Economywide GHG targets reflecting more ambitious abatement options in the agriculture sector.
- Ambitious GHG targets for the agriculture sector (e.g., reduce agriculture GHG emissions by a certain percentage from a base year by 2030).

- Quantitative non-GHG targets for the agriculture sector, such as:
  - Targets for better crop management (e.g., improved crop breeding, improved irrigation services, better crop insurance and increased hectares of agroforestry).
  - Targets for better livestock management (e.g., improved livestock productivity).
  - Targets for land management (e.g., installing renewable energy on farms, eliminating burning of agricultural residue and avoiding deforestation).
  - Targets for more sustainable production and consumption measures (e.g., food loss and waste targets and nutrition targets).
- Agriculture-related policies and actions, such as:
  - Improving extension services for farmers, including more widespread use of digital services such as early warnings and seasonal forecasts.
  - Redirecting agricultural support to improve agricultural resilience and reduce emissions.
  - Instilling safeguard measures and rights-based approaches to minimize harms.

### **Short-lived Climate Pollutants (SLCPs) Commitments in Enhanced NDCs:**

- Economywide GHG targets reflecting mitigation opportunities from SLCPs.
- Ambitious economywide SLCP-specific targets (e.g., reduce economy-wide methane emissions).
- Ambitious, sector-specific, SLCP-specific targets (e.g., reduce methane emissions from the agriculture sector).
- Non-GHG targets related to activities that reduce SLCPs, such as:
  - Residential targets (e.g., replacing traditional biomass cookstoves with modern fuel cookstoves).
  - Industry targets (e.g., replacing traditional brick kilns with improved kilns).

- Transport targets (e.g., installing particulate filters on road and off-road vehicles).
  - Agriculture targets (e.g., banning open field burning of agricultural waste).
  - Fossil fuel targets (e.g., improving efficiency of oil and gas operations).
  - Waste management targets (e.g., achieving full separation and treatment on biodegradable municipal waste with accompanying landfill gas collection).
- SLCP-related policies and actions.

## ADAPTATION

The intensifying impacts of climate change — including new precipitation patterns, rising sea levels, degrading reef systems and many other changes — are affecting the quality of life around the globe. Adaptation actions are efforts made by the government or other policy actors to avoid and reduce those adverse impacts on society.

### Country Context

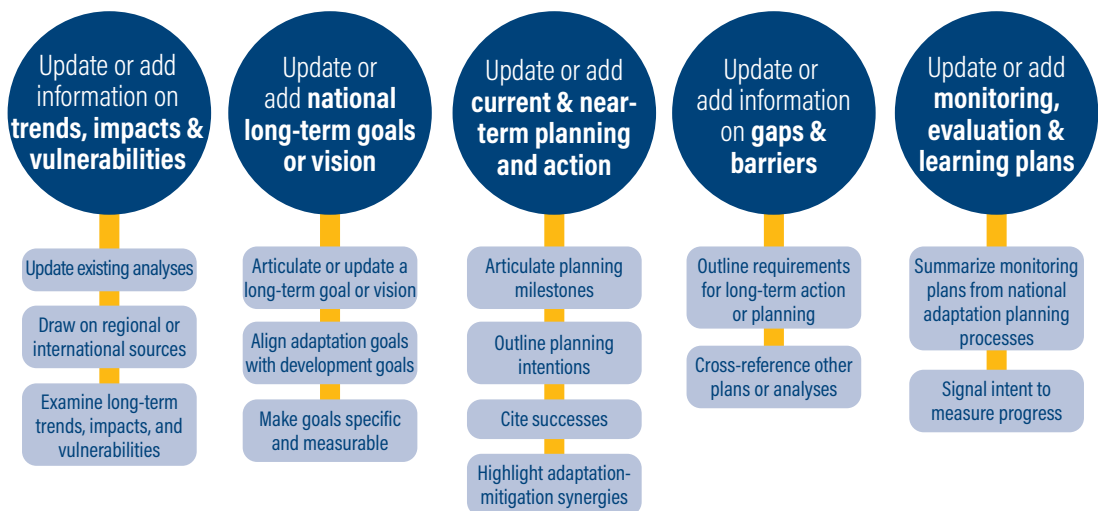
Currently, including adaptation components in an NDC is voluntary. Countries first need to consider whether to include an adaptation component in the NDC and, if so, what it intends to achieve. If countries decide to include an adaptation component in their enhanced NDC, they may need to assess the links with existing processes, how to streamline the NDC within them (e.g. SDG, DRR and biodiversity agendas), how the NDC relates to their national adaptation communications and how the NDC can adjust to the content of these tools. Then, they need to identify key elements, including adaptation priorities, strategies, policies, plans, goals and actions. Countries with limited resources and capacities to implement adaptation actions may wish to include information related to barriers, challenges and gaps, as well as support needs. After identifying these elements, countries can develop information on them while ensuring coherence with each other and with other components of the NDC.

## What to Look For

To evaluate the adaptation elements in an NDC, consider the following:

- Are NDC goals and actions linked to a clear, evidence-based summary of current and projected climate change risks, including possible effects on vulnerable groups, ecosystems and sectors within the country?
- Are specific climate studies, assessments, policies, project documents or other references used in developing the adaptation component of the NDC?
- Is there a clear, evidence-based statement of climate trends, impacts and vulnerabilities, and how planned action will address them?
- Does the NDC contain specific actions to promote adaptation and climate resilience?
- Does the NDC contain data and analysis on long-term goals and a vision for sustainable development?
- Does the NDC contain a plan to prioritize actions with long-term sustainable development goals as detailed in the IPCC 1.5° report, including actions that synergize adaptation and mitigation benefits where appropriate?
- Does the NDC contain specific actions on nature-based solutions which can provide significant adaptation co-benefits, such as regulating water supplies during droughts, protecting coastal communities during storm surges and moderating heat waves in cities?

**FIGURE 3 |** Options for Enhancing Adaptation Content



Source: Fransen et al. 2017.

# CLARITY, TRANSPARENCY AND UNDERSTANDING

Clear communication of NDCs builds trust and facilitates effective implementation. Guidance on communication — or clarity, transparency and understanding (CTU) — is based on the Paris Agreement Work Program adopted in 2018. Transparent communication should not create additional burdens to countries; rather, it is simply an exercise in documenting the details agreed upon during the process of enhancing the NDC. The required information to facilitate CTU, agreed to in COP24, aims to improve on perceived information gaps stemming from initial NDCs.

## Country Context

It is worth noting that, while it is a requirement to use information to facilitate CTU per the COP24 decision (contained in Annex I of Decision 4/CMA.1) for countries' second and subsequent NDCs, it is not required for first NDCs. For those Parties with NDCs that end in 2025, this will be immediately relevant for the new NDCs submitted in the lead-up to COP26. In addition, the decision strongly encourages Parties to provide this information for their first NDCs, including when communicating or updating them. It can be helpful preparation to use the guidance for the enhanced NDCs and for the basis of tracking progress and achievement of the NDCs.

However, all countries should review the list of required information to determine which elements are relevant and applicable to the NDC and whether there are any insufficiencies, in which case they should aim to address them in the enhancement process. If a country already provides sufficient information in their NDC to facilitate a clear understanding of their intentions, they should continue to do so in subsequent NDC submissions.

## What to Look For

To understand transparency in NDC communication, consider the following:

- Does the NDC include all relevant information to facilitate CTU? This includes:
  - Quantifiable information on the reference point (including a base year if appropriate).
  - Timeframes or period of implementation.
  - Scope and coverage.
  - Planning processes.
  - Assumptions and methodological approaches, including those for estimating and accounting for anthropogenic GHG emissions and, as appropriate, removals.
  - How the country considered that its NDC is fair and ambitious in light of its national circumstances.
  - How the NDC contributes toward achieving the objective of the convention as set out in Article 2 (Fransen et al. 2019).
- Does the NDC include all relevant information for domestic purposes?
- Is there any additional information, beyond requirements under the Paris Agreement and related decisions, that would enhance clarity, transparency and understanding for domestic constituencies?

# NDC ENHANCEMENT PROCESS

The process for NDC enhancement will drive the content of the NDC and will ultimately underpin its successful implementation. A robust process will include buy-in at the highest levels of government; clear and coordinated institutional arrangements; broad, meaningful stakeholder engagement; and a work plan with clear roles and responsibilities. Some countries may build on existing arrangements, though NDC enhancement can also be an opportunity to revisit and strengthen the NDC design process. Countries that have long-term strategies in place can use such strategies to inform the NDC enhancement process, including its institutional arrangements and stakeholder engagement mechanism (see A Brief Guide for Reviewing Countries' Long-term Strategies).

## What to Look For

Ideally, countries will publicize details on their NDC enhancement process, though these details will not necessarily appear in the NDC itself. This will improve transparency and can help stakeholders understand whether their views are represented. To understand the effectiveness of an NDC enhancement process, consider the following:

- Who initiated and led the process?
  - Who supported the enhancement process?
  - Who was the lead institution and was there intra-governmental coordination?
  - Are these arrangements permanent or temporary?
- Who participated in the process?
  - Did the effort actively engage other government entities across all sectors of the economy?
  - Were broader stakeholders such as businesses, civil society, local communities, women, youth, labor unions and industry groups meaningfully included. Were these stakeholders provided the opportunity to share their views and raise their most urgent challenges and solutions?
- How was the engagement process structured?
  - Was proper stakeholder mapping conducted, and did the process include marginalized and vulnerable groups?
  - Did stakeholders receive enough time and opportunity to review documents and develop their own input and feedback?
  - Were materials and information made accessible to stakeholders and translated into local languages if necessary?
  - Were there enough consultation meetings with all relevant stakeholders?
  - Were stakeholder views taken on board and are they reflected in the current NDC?
- How were objectives defined?
  - What questions came up and how were they answered?
  - What data, reports, existing plans and models helped shape the vision and narrative of the NDC?
- Was a work plan adopted?
  - Were roles and responsibilities clearly defined, and were timelines established?
  - Are monitoring mechanisms in place?
  - Does civil society have clear roles and responsibilities in the implementation phase of the NDC?
- What follow-up mechanisms exist?
  - Are there processes or mechanisms for stakeholders to access further information, raise concerns, offer solutions and recommendations and continuously engage in implementation, monitoring and future enhancement processes?

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