

Key points

Policymakers should recognise that the Belém Adaptation Indicators decided upon at COP30 are a first agreed package, not an implementation-ready system. The priority leading up to COP32 in Addis Ababa in 2027 should be learning through use, rather than defending the list as complete or fixed.

Governments should pilot a small subset of the indicators, supported by technical partners and climate funds, to test the indicators' feasibility, clarify definitions and pinpoint critical data gaps.

The Belém–Addis focus should be on usability. The technical and policy alignment tracks offer an opportunity to translate the indicators into practical guidance, including clearer data, realistic methods and illustrative country experiences.

Climate funds have a critical role in supporting the implementation of the indicators by offering finance and technical guidance to strengthen national capacities. This will help to ensure the indicators improve learning and decision making rather than increasing reporting pressures.

From aspiration to application: making the Global Goal on Adaptation work

The 2025 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP30) delivered the first agreed indicator package for tracking progress under the 2023 United Arab Emirates (UAE) Framework for Global Climate Resilience, but it also exposed a gap between political agreement and practical use. This briefing traces the evolution of the Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA) from its adoption in Paris in 2015 to now, and analyses the UAE–Belém indicator process and the 59 Belém Adaptation Indicators that emerged from COP30. It argues that COP30 should be treated as a milestone, rather than an endpoint, for adaptation indicators. Looking ahead to COP32 in 2027, this briefing highlights the Belém–Addis Vision on Adaptation as a pathway for turning the indicators into practice, prioritising early piloting, clearer methods and metadata, and investment in national data and reporting capacity.

The GGA sits at the centre of a long-running push by developing countries to secure adaptation's status as equal to mitigation in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). For many vulnerable countries, lack of adaptation is not a future challenge but a present constraint on people's lives and livelihoods, as well as development choices. Yet for years, adaptation work under the UNFCCC only advanced through scattered initiatives rather than a single shared objective equivalent to the temperature goal.

That began to change with the signing of the Paris Agreement at COP21 in 2015. Article 7 of the agreement established the GGA and framed it around enhancing adaptive capacity, strengthening resilience and reducing vulnerability.¹ The political significance of this move was clear: adaptation was formally recognised as a global endeavour rather than just a set of national

actions. What remained unclear was how to translate the goal into operational targets and how to understand progress over time in a way that respected national diversity while enabling a credible global narrative on adaptation.

From COP21 to COP26: the 'silent years'

Unlike mitigation, where progress can be tracked through emissions and quantified targets, adaptation is inherently harder to measure. Some even argued that adaptation is purely local and can only be dealt with at the national level. After all, progress on adaptation is shaped by local climate risks, institutional capacity, development conditions and historical vulnerabilities.² Following COP21, the GGA remained a compelling idea but did not immediately become a practical framework. Between 2015 and 2020, limited progress on defining the GGA created

growing frustration with the process, especially as climate impacts intensified and the pressure to demonstrate results increased.

This context set the stage for COP26 in Glasgow in 2021, where Parties launched the Glasgow–Sharm el-Sheikh (GlaSS) work programme. The work programme was time-bound and purpose-driven: it was intended to clarify what the GGA should mean in practice.³ Through workshops and submissions, Parties began surfacing core questions about what success looks like in adaptation, how global objectives relate to national contexts and how progress can be tracked without turning adaptation into a ranking exercise. COP26 did not resolve these questions, but it did create the political space for structured work on the GGA.

COP28: defining the UAE Framework for Global Climate Resilience

Midway through the GlaSS work programme, it became clear that the GGA needed a framework with more concrete architecture. That architecture was agreed at COP28 in Dubai in 2023 through the UAE Framework for Global Climate Resilience (UAE Framework).⁴ This was a major turning point, moving the GGA from a broad aspiration to a structured set of targets intended to guide collective action and understanding.

The UAE Framework includes 11 targets: seven thematic targets,⁵ plus four dimensional targets aligned to the stages of the iterative adaptation cycle.⁶ The thematic targets reflect key outcome areas where resilience should be strengthened. The dimensional targets recognise that adaptation is not a single intervention, but a cycle of risk assessment, planning, implementation, monitoring and learning. The framework's contribution was not only the number of targets set but the political signal it sent: Parties had agreed on a shared structure for what the GGA was trying to achieve.

The Belém adaptation indicators: a politically contested result

Since Parties were committing to progress under the UAE Framework, they needed a way to assess that progress. This is where the second two-year process began: the UAE–Belém work programme, which was tasked with developing indicators to measure progress towards the UAE Framework targets.

Setting the indicators proved fraught from the start. Technically, developing robust indicators requires clear definitions, methodologies, metadata, mapping of data availability, and

feasibility across contexts. Politically, indicators are rarely neutral. They can be interpreted as performance measures, linked to accountability expectations, or associated with eligibility or prioritisation for support. These concerns are amplified in adaptation, where finance and capacity needs are central and national circumstances vary widely.

The UAE–Belém process was nonetheless designed to be both ambitious and inclusive. In September 2024, the chairs of the Subsidiary Bodies (SB) of the UNFCCC appointed a group of 78 experts to develop a longlist of possible indicators.⁷ The experts were selected to reflect a balance of regions and technical perspectives. Many saw this as a meaningful step beyond the usual 'small room' format, broadening participation and bringing more diverse technical knowledge into the GGA work.

The scale of the task, however, was enormous. Experts were asked to consolidate a vast universe of candidate indicators — estimated at around 10,000 — drawn from Party submissions and wider technical compilations prepared through UNFCCC processes.⁸ By September 2025, they delivered a final list of 100 potential indicators spanning all targets under the UAE Framework. This list was then taken to COP30 for political consideration and adoption.

At COP30, Parties ultimately agreed on 59 indicators: the Belém Adaptation Indicators.⁹ These indicators diverged substantially from the experts' list (see Figure 1).¹⁰ Many delegations were particularly concerned by the scale and nature of the changes, but also by how late they emerged — the revised list only appeared in the final draft text in the closing days of the conference and was new to many Parties who had not previously engaged on its content. As a result, tensions rose sharply in the final hours of COP30, nearly crashing the closing plenary.

Why a 'perfect' indicator list was never realistic

It is tempting to frame COP30 as a simple contest between two lists: the experts' list and the adopted Belém Adaptation Indicators. But the more important lesson is structural: a 'perfect' list was never a realistic outcome given how the task was set up. Indicator development is inherently iterative and normally requires piloting, data mapping and revision.¹¹ Yet the UAE–Belém process had to deliver the indicators largely through workshops and negotiation settings, rather than sustained technical testing.

Moreover, while the experts nominally had 18 months to develop their list, the goalposts kept

moving. The expected final outcome was only clarified at COP29 in Baku in late 2024, when Parties agreed the list should be capped at 100 indicators. Meanwhile, the guidance expanded rapidly. What began as high-level direction from the SB60 meeting in mid-2024, escalated into more than 50 separate lines of guidance from Parties at COP29 in late 2024 and SB62 in mid-2025. This meant that the experts were asked to resolve some politically sensitive trade-offs through a technical process, while having progressively less room to exercise technical judgement.

Compounding this, the purpose of the indicators was never fully established. Global indicators can serve different functions: global aggregation, national reporting, learning and feedback, or informing discussions on the means of implementation. Each implies different design choices. Trying to meet all functions at once, under tight timelines and amid contested debates on finance, capacity building and technology transfer, inevitably produced a list shaped as much by politics and process constraints as by technical optimisation.

A more constructive reading, therefore, is to treat COP30 as a milestone rather than an end-state on adaptation indicators. The Belém Adaptation Indicators should be understood as a first package of indicators that was politically feasible to develop and adopt under the time constraints, rather than the final word on how adaptation progress ought to be measured. In practice, indicator systems mature through use. Many design questions cannot be settled on paper; they only become clear once countries try to apply indicators in real planning and reporting cycles, link them to existing national monitoring frameworks, and confront practical issues of data availability, frequency, comparability and reporting burdens.

The road to COP32: Belém–Addis Vision on Adaptation

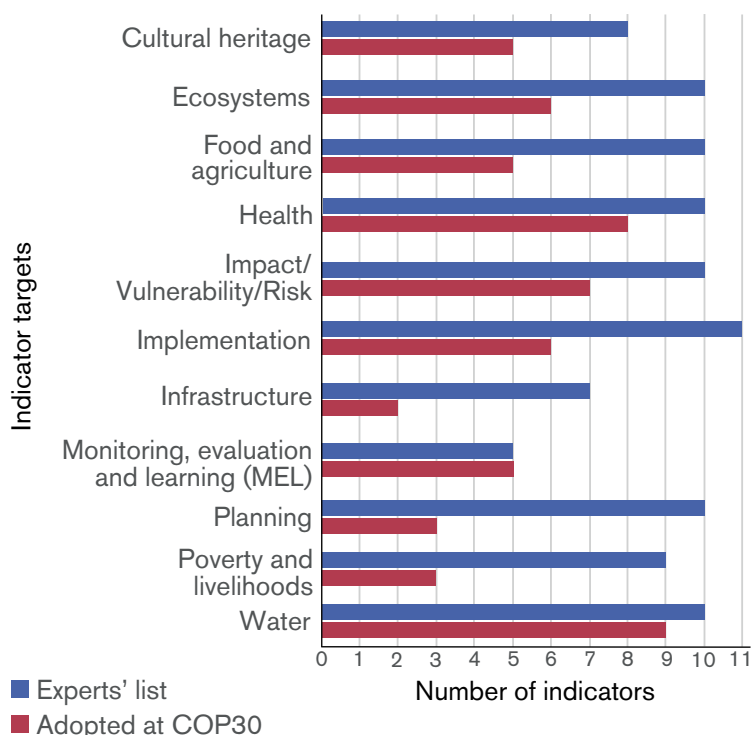
The Belém Adaptation Indicators drew most of the political attention at COP30. But technically, the outcome went beyond a mere list. Parties also adopted an implementation package intended to move the decision from negotiated text to something countries can apply in practice — with clearer methods, stronger metadata, and a pathway for learning and refinement.

At the centre of this package is the Belém–Addis Vision on Adaptation, which launches two parallel workstreams through to COP32 in Addis Ababa in 2027 (see Figure 2). The first is a technical track, led by a taskforce, focused on improving metadata and methodologies for the indicators. The second is a political track, aimed at collecting countries' experiences of testing the indicators,

including how they link to national systems and UNFCCC reporting requirements for Parties. Both tracks are expected to conclude by COP32, making that the next major checkpoint for how the framework will function in practice.

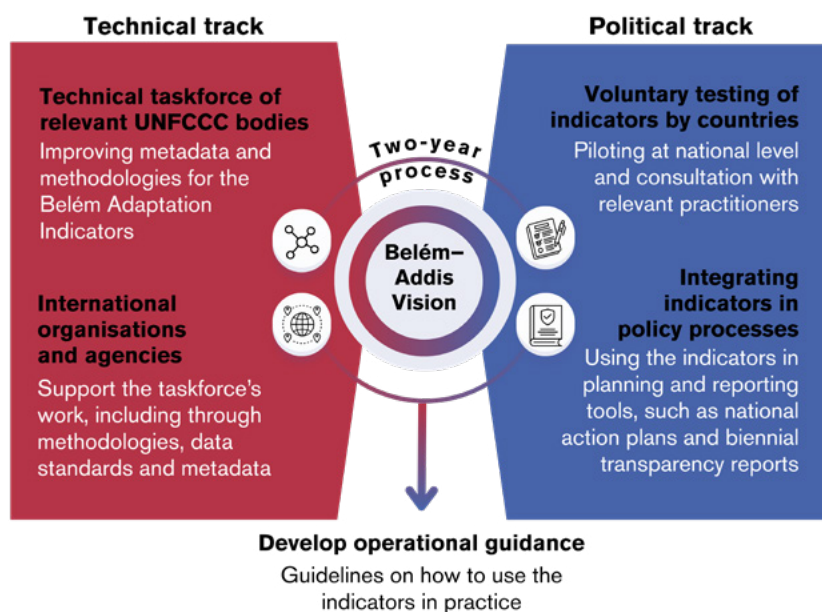
While the modalities will be further unpacked at SB64 in Bonn in mid-2026, the COP30 decision

Figure 1. Number of indicators by target on experts' list vs agreed at COP30



Note: numeric comparison only; does not capture changes in indicator wording or content.

Figure 2. Belém–Addis Vision on Adaptation workstreams



already encourages countries to start testing the indicators and use existing channels — notably National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) and biennial transparency reports (BTRs) — to share feedback. This early experience is intended to inform the policy alignment process and shape the guidance that will be a core output of COP32.

The remaining question is resourcing. COP30 invited the Adaptation Fund, the Green Climate Fund and the Global Environment Facility to support developing countries in implementing the UAE Framework, including through strengthening reporting capacity. It is not yet clear how these institutions will respond, but the invitation is notable — direct signals to funds from a thematic negotiating track are relatively uncommon, as guidance to financial entities is usually routed through dedicated finance negotiations.

Next steps: from principle to practice

The Belém Adaptation Indicators have been decided, despite all the controversies, but agreement is not the same as usability. A country can read the 59 indicators and still be left with basic operational questions: what exactly is being measured, where should the data come from, how frequently can it be updated and what methods are expected to be used. Yet the post-COP30 narrative often implies that implementation can simply begin, particularly if finance follows.

This creates a clear dilemma for the next phase. Progress depends on countries starting to apply the indicators so that practice can generate learning and improvement. At the same time, many countries will need clearer guidance and support before they can use the indicators in a consistent or meaningful way. Without a deliberate step to translate the indicators into practice, they risk remaining a technically agreed reference point rather than an operational tool.

Therefore, the next steps should focus on usability and learning:

Countries may wish to start with a practical entry point rather than the full list. Piloting a manageable subset of indicators through existing systems, such as the preparation of the second BTR, can help identify what is workable now, where definitions require clarification and where there are critical data gaps.

The UNFCCC secretariat has an important role to play in supporting the implementation of the Belém Adaptation Indicators. Its mandated technical paper provides an opportunity to produce implementation-oriented guidance: clarifying potential uses of the indicators through examples from different regions, mapping existing synthesis and reporting processes that can be built on, identifying synergies and gaps, and outlining realistic approaches to adaptation data aggregation under the UAE Framework.

International organisations and practitioners can support interested countries during early piloting by helping to map data sources, troubleshoot methodologies and synthesise lessons across countries' experiences. Consolidating these lessons will be particularly valuable in informing policy alignment towards COP32.

Finally, **support providers and funds can help ensure implementation is feasible** by investing in the enabling conditions: reporting capacity, data systems, and the upfront work required for piloting and iteration, alongside broader adaptation programming. With these elements in place, the period until COP32 can be used to build a stronger evidence base for what works in practice and to support a smoother pathway from decision text to implementation.

Looking ahead, the value of early piloting is not only national; it is what determines whether the next global stocktake on progress towards meeting the goals of the Paris Agreement has enough usable evidence to deliver a credible collective assessment of adaptation progress and constraints, and to inform where ambition and support should focus over the next five-year cycle. Without real-world testing, interpretation and synthesis, inputs will remain fragmented and adaptation will again struggle to carry weight in the global stocktake conversation. Usability and learning now are the difference between a stocktake that moves Parties from identifying adaptation gaps to acting on them, and another cycle where adaptation remains a noted importance but with limited delivery.

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FIND OUT MORE

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Notes

¹ United Nations (2015) Paris Agreement. / ² Pörtner, H-O et al. (eds) (2022) Climate change 2022: impacts, adaptation and vulnerability. Working Group II contribution to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge and New York. doi:10.1017/9781009325844. / ³ UNFCCC (2021) Glasgow–Sharm el-Sheikh work programme on the global goal on adaptation. Decision 7/CMA.3. Bonn. / ⁴ Fielding, O (2024) Decoding the Global Goal on Adaptation at COP28. International Peace Institute, New York. / ⁵ Food security; water security; health resilience; infrastructure resilience; livelihood protection; ecosystem protection; and cultural heritage. / ⁶ Impact, vulnerability and risk assessment; planning; implementation; and monitoring, evaluation and learning. / ⁷ UNFCCC (2024) The experts convened by the SB Chairs to assist in the technical work under the United Arab Emirates–Belém work programme. Bonn. / ⁸ UNFCCC Adaptation Committee (2024) Contribution of the Adaptation Committee to a compilation and mapping of existing indicators. Bonn. / ⁹ UNFCCC (2025) Global goal on adaptation. Draft decision -/CMA.7. Proposal by the President. FCCC/PA/CMA/2025/L.25. Bonn. / ¹⁰ UNFCCC (2025) Final list of potential indicators, UAE–Belém work programme on indicators. Bonn. / ¹¹ Bours, D et al. (2013) Monitoring and evaluation for climate change adaptation: a synthesis of tools, frameworks and approaches. SEA Change Community of Practice, Phnom Penh and UKCIP, Oxford.

