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# DECODING INTENDED NATIONALLY DETERMINED CONTRIBUTIONS (INDCS):

A Guide for Understanding Country Commitments

Learn what INDCs are, why they are important, what factors determine how robust they are and how to ask the right questions to evaluate a specific INDC.

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## ABOUT INDCS

Intended Nationally Determined Contributions, or INDCs, are public outlines of what individual countries plan to do to deal with a changing climate, starting in 2020 under a new international climate agreement. This agreement is expected to be adopted in December in Paris at the end of the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conference of the Parties (COP21). INDCs serve as critical inputs for COP21, where countries will determine whether the world achieves an ambitious agreement and is put on an accelerated path towards a low-carbon, climate-resilient future.

### Why INDCs are important

An INDC lays out a country's vision for climate action well into the next decade, and this vision will drive policy and investment at the local, national and global level for years to come. These political commitments to address climate change can help governments build a [new climate economy](#) where emissions reductions, sustainable economic development and poverty reduction go hand in hand. As these policies and investments gain momentum, they can spur more ambitious commitments at the international level.

### Elements of a strong INDC

A strong INDC is both fair and ambitious. It supports the objective of the UNFCCC—meaning that it lines up with what science tells us is necessary to avoid the worst impacts of climate change. Moreover, it is linked to national priorities and it is feasible to implement. Finally, it is reported transparently, so that everyone can understand what the country intends to achieve and can monitor progress towards that achievement.

## 6 KEY QUESTIONS TO ASK IN EVALUATING AN INDC

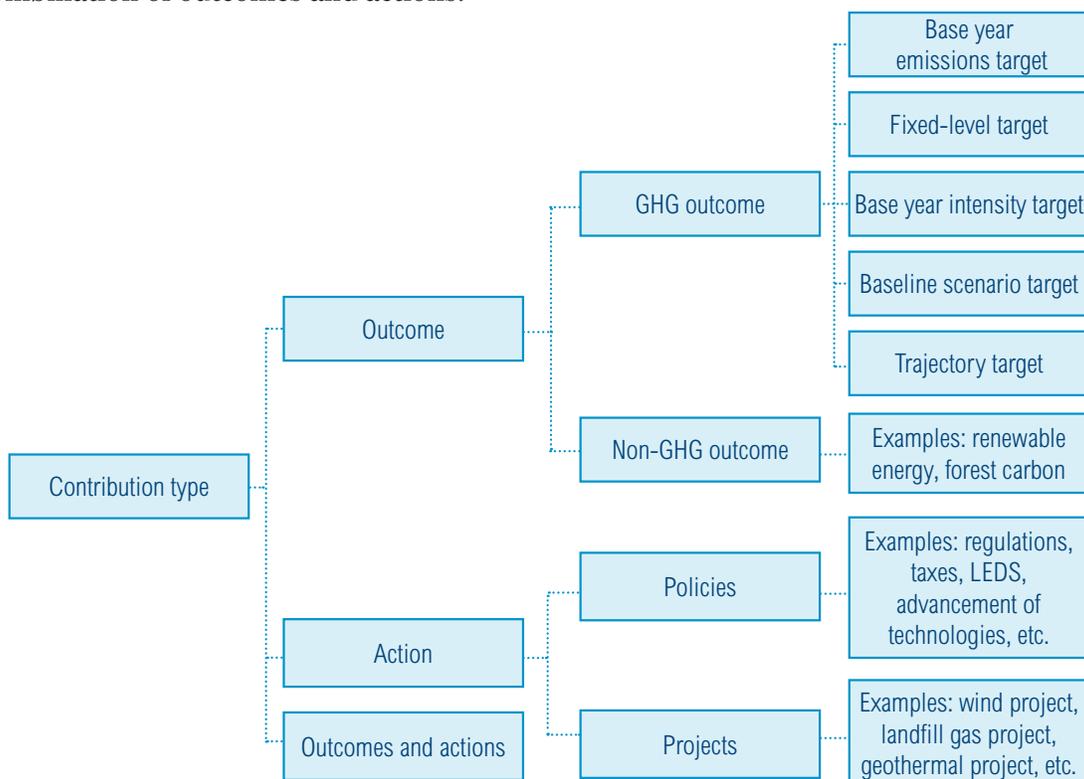
The following questions are designed to support the evaluation of an INDC.

1. Does the INDC contain a clear statement of intent?
2. Is the INDC in line with science?
3. Is the INDC fair and ambitious?
4. Has the INDC been designed following a strong process?
5. Is the INDC feasible to implement?
6. Is the INDC transparent?

### 1. DOES THE INDC CONTAIN A CLEAR STATEMENT OF INTENT?

#### Mitigation:

As the figure below depicts, countries can put forward mitigation contributions in various forms. They can present commitments in the form of “actions”, and then provide detail in the form of policies and projects. Actions represent an intent to implement specific measures to support GHG reductions. Alternatively, countries can present their commitments in the form of “outcomes,” and then provide detail on each specific outcome. Outcomes represent an intent to achieve a specific result, such as a reduction of GHG emissions to a specific level (a GHG outcome) or an increase in renewable energy to a specific level (a non-GHG outcome). Also, a country may pose its commitment as a combination of outcomes and actions.



Countries should ideally commit to quantified outcomes, which can provide a better understanding of future emissions reductions and emissions levels associated with their commitment. Quantified outcomes also allow for easier tracking of the GHG effects of the INDCs. They can boost credibility with potential finance providers and markets and enhance comparability between countries' INDCs. Additionally, compared to GHG actions, GHG outcomes make it simpler to estimate the aggregate global GHG effects of INDCs.

### Adaptation:

The intensifying impacts of climate change—including new precipitation patterns, rising sea levels, degradation of reef systems and many other changes—are affecting the quality of life around the globe. Governments can strengthen their countries' resilience to these impacts by developing and implementing adaptation plans. While not required, all countries are invited to consider including an adaptation component in their INDCs. In doing so, countries can highlight national goals and commitments to reduce the risks they face from a changing climate, as well as outline gaps, barriers and needs to achieve those goals and commitments. For many countries, the INDC's adaptation component should draw from or link to stakeholder-driven, multi-sectoral adaptation planning, such as National Adaptation Plans.

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### WHAT TO LOOK FOR:

- A clear statement of a quantified mitigation outcome that the country intends to achieve, which addresses: *change in what (e.g. emissions, emissions intensity of GDP), relative to what (e.g. a base year, a baseline scenario), over what time (e.g. by 2025, by 2030)*
- Clarity on what future emissions will be under the INDC
- If adaptation is included, a component that compiles material from existing national plans and actions, and communicates clear, accessible and meaningful goals and priorities

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## 2. IS THE INDC IN LINE WITH SCIENCE?

Under paragraph 14 of the Lima Call for Climate Action, countries were invited to describe how their intended nationally determined contribution “contributes to the achievement of the objective of the Convention” (UNFCCC 2014). The latest climate science demonstrates [what needs to happen to global emissions](#) in order to have a likely chance of limiting warming to 2 degrees C, the goal adopted by the UNFCCC. Global emissions must peak by 2020, and net GHG emissions must be phased out over the long term. This will require all major emitting regions to make substantial reductions below their projected baseline business-as-usual emissions over the course of this century. Cumulative global emissions must stay within the carbon budget, which is the maximum amount of cumulative carbon the world can emit to have a likely chance of limiting warming to 2 degrees C. Two-thirds of the global carbon budget have already been exhausted, and the remaining one-third is expected to be used up in the next two decades if emissions growth continues without further mitigation.

Delaying emissions reductions now and expecting a fast decline later will not only be costly, but may be technologically and socially unfeasible. Transitioning systems—such as turning over a fleet of vehicles or retrofitting power plants—takes time, as does changing behavior and implementing new policies. INDCs should not allow countries to postpone mitigation efforts so long that very steep—perhaps unrealistic—rates of decline would be needed later this century. Rather, INDCs should encourage near-term decarbonization at a feasible yet transformative rate.

For countries that include an adaptation component, INDC goals and actions should be linked to a clear, evidence-based summary of current and projected climate change risks. The summary should address the possible effects of climate change on vulnerable groups, ecosystems and sectors within the country.

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#### WHAT TO LOOK FOR:

- An indication of when emissions will peak/have peaked and the associated peaking level
- A statement of intent to phase out net GHG emissions over the long term
- A transformative yet realistic decarbonization rate, in light of the year in which emissions will peak and the year by which they will be phased out
- A significant reduction in GHG emissions relative to “business as usual” emissions, especially if “business as usual” does not already reflect ambitious policies
- A multi-year goal, limiting emissions for a series of consecutive years, rather than a single-year goal
- A clear, evidence-based statement of climate trends, impacts, and vulnerabilities, if an adaptation component is included in the INDC

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### 3. IS THE INDC FAIR AND AMBITIOUS?

Under paragraph 14 of the Lima Call for Climate Action, countries were invited to describe how their intended nationally determined contribution is “*fair and ambitious, in light of national circumstances*” (UNFCCC 2014). Including a robust and transparent description for each of these elements provides an opportunity for each country to reflect on how it perceives fairness and ambition for itself and for others, as well as how it measures its contribution. This is important for enhanced clarity, greater understanding and evaluation among countries.

A fair and ambitious contribution can be described in terms of the country’s potential to act to the greatest extent possible given its emissions responsibility, its emissions projections (including planned actions), its capabilities, and its vulnerability and capacity to adapt to climate impacts. It should be a contribution that maximizes the opportunities presented by climate action in a way that is in line with broader sustainable development goals.

Countries may explain **fairness** through multiple criteria, such as emissions responsibility (such as historical, current or projected future emissions per capita or total emissions), economic capacity and development indicators (such as GDP per capita), and relative costs and benefits of action in line with their potential to act.

**Ambition** can be demonstrated through evidence that the contribution goes as far as possible to realize the country's potential to act and drive transformation in key sectors, such as energy and forestry, while taking into account the country's economic development status, its resources, and other national characteristics. Countries may explain ambition through multiple criteria, such as: total mitigation potential based on technically and economically-feasible, benchmarks for the annual rate of emissions reductions, and other factors.

The Lima outcome does not provide guidance on specific factors or indicators to use in providing a description of fairness and ambition in INDCs. Countries should draw together a range of factors to provide a holistic description of fairness and ambition, keeping in mind indicators that address core considerations or are being used by a number of countries (such as the indicators listed below).

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#### WHAT TO LOOK FOR:

- Inclusion of qualitative and quantitative data that places the contribution within the national context (e.g. historic and projected emissions, emissions per capita, GDP per capita, national energy profile)
- Comparison of the contribution to a range of global benchmarks (e.g. emissions reduction and decarbonization rates)
- Alignment of the contribution with the country's mitigation potential based on mitigation opportunities determined to be technologically and economically feasible and/or evidence that the contribution can be achieved under a package of best practice policies and drive long-term transformation in key sectors
- Projected emissions with and without INDC implementation
- If an adaptation component is included, data and analysis on vulnerable communities and sectors, including gender assessment, capacity to adapt, long-term goals and vision for sustainable development
- If an adaptation component is included, action to promote adaptation and climate resilience
- Prioritization of climate action that demonstrates alignment with long-term sustainable development goals, including, where appropriate, actions that synergize adaptation and mitigation benefits

## 4. HAS THE INDC BEEN DESIGNED FOLLOWING A STRONG PROCESS?

Because INDCs are nationally determined, each country decides its own appropriate contribution based on its national circumstances and capabilities. Accordingly, an INDC must be linked to national priorities and processes. An INDC that exists in a vacuum—unmoored from other national priorities, policies and institutions—is unlikely to be implemented effectively or serve the country’s objectives. A robust INDC will link clearly to other national objectives, such as climate policies, adaptation planning processes such as National Adaptation Plans, or development plans or vision statements. Moreover, it will be consistent not only with climate-focused plans and policies, but also those of key sectors (such as energy and forests) that drive emissions—or it will provide for a process to work towards this consistency over time.

A strong INDC will be backed by a political commitment at the highest level, with clear mandates and defined roles, responsibilities and timelines for design and implementation. Likewise, coordination among relevant institutions is essential and can improve efficiency and problem solving. It is also important to build knowledge and technical capacities, and to secure and manage the right resources. Finally, the INDC development and implementation process must be inclusive and transparent and reflect a range of stakeholder perspectives if it is to adequately respond to needs and gain long-term support.

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### WHAT TO LOOK FOR:

- Consistency with the most current and comprehensive national plans, visions, strategies, policies and laws, or a process to work towards such consistency
  - Evidence of high-level political commitment
  - Clearly defined mandates, roles, responsibilities and timeline for design and implementation
  - Evidence of, or a process for, coordination among relevant ministries/agencies
  - Whether and how stakeholder concerns have been reflected
  - Adequate capacity and resources for preparation of the INDC
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## 5. IS THE INDC FEASIBLE TO IMPLEMENT?

INDCs may represent national aspirational goals that will require the implementation of specific policy instruments—sometimes through new legislation, regulation or executive order—so as to encourage changes in technologies, processes and practices that drive GHG mitigation and adaptation. The more clearly governments can articulate how their INDC goals will support policy interventions that will drive these changes, the more confidence stakeholders will have that the INDC is credible and that the government is serious about implementing it.

Countries should also consider what means of implementation—such as technology, finance and capacity building—they will need in order to execute the INDC. For developing countries, in addition to domestic resources, this may also include international support. If all or part of the INDC will depend on international support, specificity on both the type and quantity of the support and what exactly it will achieve can facilitate effective delivery of support and enhance accountability for both developed and developing countries.

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### WHAT TO LOOK FOR:

- Description of relevant legal authorities to be used to implement and enforce the INDC
  - Description of relevant policy instruments to be used to implement the INDC, and their current status (planned, adopted, implemented)
  - Clarity on when and how new policy instruments will be adopted and implemented, if the INDC requires them
  - Clarity on how the INDC will draw on existing policies to go beyond current activities, if the INDC draws primarily on policies already in place
  - A statement of gaps, barriers and needs to achieve stated adaptation goals
  - A statement of how much and what kind of additional international support is needed to achieve specific aspects of the INDC
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## 6. IS THE INDC TRANSPARENT?

It is important that INDCs be communicated transparently in order to understand the individual and aggregate impacts of countries' proposed commitments, including whether global emissions after 2020 will be in line with the goal to hold the increase in global average temperature below 2 degrees C. Determining the collective impact of all countries' INDCs requires an understanding of the assumptions and methodologies that underpin these commitments. Providing detailed information about an INDC can also be useful for enhancing domestic implementation by clarifying assumptions needed to implement the contribution and communicating those assumptions to domestic stakeholders. Additionally, communicating an INDC may help provide a better understanding of finance, capacity and technology needs, if relevant.

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### WHAT TO LOOK FOR:

- INDC type and emissions reduction or limitation level, as well as a reference scenario or base year
- Time frames and/or periods for implementation of the INDC
- Scope and coverage of the INDC (sectors, gases, geography, percentage of national emissions)
- Information on planning processes, such as the process for preparing, implementing, and tracking of the INDC
- Assumptions and methodological approaches including those for estimating and accounting for anthropogenic GHG emissions and removals (see Open Book list for a detailed list related to metrics, market mechanisms, the land sector and specific contribution types)
- How the country considers its INDC to be fair and ambitious (in light of its national circumstances) and how it contributes towards achieving the objective of the Convention
- If an adaptation component is included, how planned actions address specific climate vulnerabilities and risks
- If an adaptation component is included, citation of specific climate studies, assessments, policies, project documents or other references used in developing the INDC.

Please see our [Open Book project](#) for further details on transparency in INDCs.

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INDC submissions are not a destination; they're the beginning of a journey toward continuous commitments to address climate change. A 2015 agreement based on robust INDCs can kick-start an upward spiral of ambition, where the world combats climate change more and more aggressively, leading to a phase out of GHG emissions.

## About WRI

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For additional INDC resources, blogs and publications, as well as a list of our INDC experts, refer to the World Resources Institute [INDC](#) webpage.

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