

Adaptation to climate change and public policy in Mexico: operability review

Stephanie Victoria Ascencio Serrato¹

Abstract

Climate change adaptation is a cross-cutting issue, which in practice tends to be mainstreamed into other sectorial policies. However, due to the increasing activity within the field, the question of whether adaptation should constitute a new field of policy, arises. The aim of this paper is to discuss if adaptation should become a new field of policy or if it should be mainstreamed into other sectorial policies, and what the implications of each of the two options are. To this end, it studies the case of Mexico as a developing country.

Keywords: *Adaptation policy, Policy field, Operability, Mexico*

Introduction

Adaptation to climate change can stand-alone as a sphere of policy, or be mainstreamed into other existing policies. The cross-cutting nature of adaptation has led to its mainstreaming into other sectorial policies such as water resources, disaster risk reduction, and agriculture, amongst others (Dovers and Hezri 2010; Moser y Ekstrom 2010). Moreover, at the international level, the Paris Agreement² (2015) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)³ call for action to address climate change and integrate adaptation measures into national policies, strategies and planning. However, given the greater political activity and the relevance that adaptation has gained worldwide, the question of whether it is possible to consider adaptation as a new field of policy and what would the implications of such a move be, has arisen (Massey and Huitema 2013; Massey et al. 2014). In addition, new approaches to traditional mainstreaming or integration have been sought with the aim of creating new structures and institutions for transformative change (Henstra 2016; Helgeson and Ellis 2015).

¹ Department of Public Law, Rovira i Virgili University, Spain.

Email: stephanie.ascencios@gmail.com

² See paragraph 5, art.7 Paris Agreement «...with a view to integrating adaptation into relevant socioeconomic and environmental policies and actions, where appropriate».

³ See target 3, goal 13 SDGs «Integrate climate change measures into national policies, strategies and planning».

Methodology

This research is part of the author's doctoral thesis developed with the support of the Mexican National Council for Science and Technology (CONACYT), and of the project "Global climate constitution: governance and law in a complex context" (CONCLIMA) from Rovira i Virgili University (Spain). This research aims to discuss both strategies from a practical standpoint to argue that a mixed approach is more suitable for effective adaptation. In this sense, it studies the case of Mexico as a developing country considered as a leader in designing climate change policies to assess the evolution and trend of adaptation in this country. For this purpose, a document review of climate and sectoral policies and its analysis was undertaken. The official webpages of the Government were reviewed and the information that was not available online was requested from governmental entities exercising the right of access to information. Once the information was collected and organised, a desktop study was conducted.

Adaptation was analysed from a mainstreamed perspective, both vertically and horizontally, through three stages of the policy-making process: agenda setting, policy formulation and policy implementation (Huq et al. 2017), but focused on the federal planning and programming for the 2013-2018 period (policy formulation stage) (**Figure 1**).

For the horizontal analysis, the most relevant Mexican sectoral policies were selected according to their adaptation urgency and their synergies with mitigation such as health, agriculture and urban sector policy. This was done in order to answer the question on and what are the sectoral policies and the federal programs considering climate change adaptation criteria.

Regarding vertical integration, the question is on how development policy and climate change policy have been planned and what formal institutions for meeting adaptation objectives exist, and how they relate to each other; or if there are sufficient mechanisms available for policy and institutional articulation and coordination. Finally, the research examined what the policy instruments for adaptation were that are covered by identified programs. The aim was to determine the level of integration and the meaning of such integration in a practical sense.

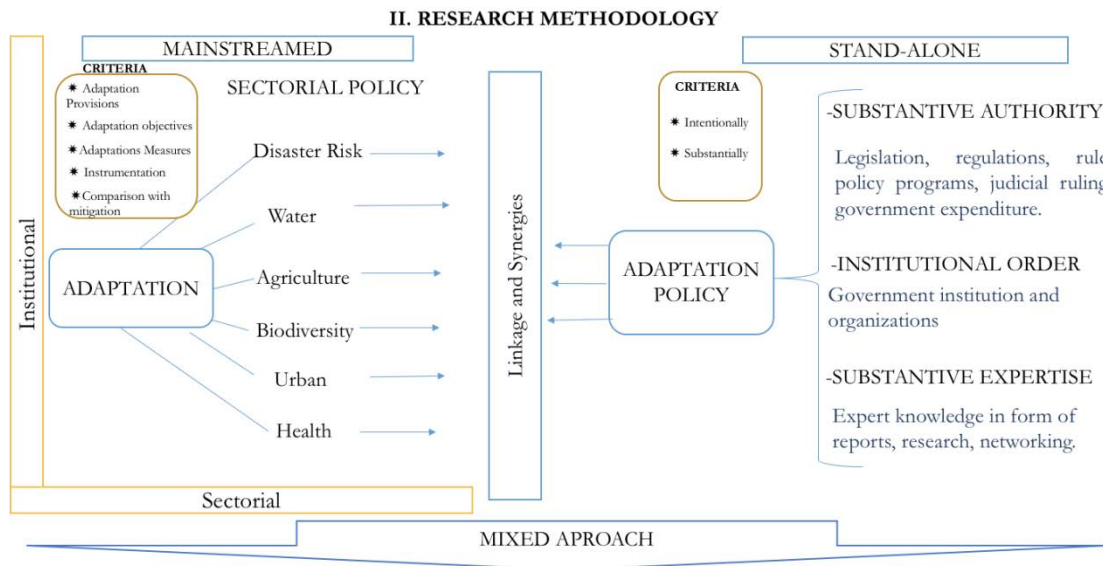


Figure 1. Methodology (Source: Authors own)

From a stand-alone perspective, the constituent elements of a new policy field (Massey and Huitema, 2013) and Mexico's activities and efforts for climate adaptation were analysed in order to establish whether it could be considered as an independent policy field. Only those efforts aimed at substantially and intentionally improving adaptation were taken into account (Dupuis and Biesbrock 2013).

Results

From a mainstreamed approach, the sector of ecosystems and biodiversity (Ecosystem-based Adaptation, or EBA) is one of the most developed. In this sense, objectives and goals as well as concepts such as adaptation, resilience, vulnerability and climate change have been included in the sectoral planning. Sectors that are at a beginning phase of integration are the health and urban sectors. In the case of water sector, it is embedded in the language of policy and programming, but implementation has been weak considering its significance for adaptation.

From a stand-alone approach, there are some elements of a new adaptation policy field such as programs, government institutions, reports or researches. However, in general these embrace both adaptation and mitigation. By looking closely at these elements, we can establish that there is a predominance of mitigation over adaptation in policy planning and implementation. Mexico, like many other countries, favors mitigation as the core of its climate policy, in the sense that there has historically been much more development of programs, researches and tools of policy focused on mitigation. Therefore, it considers that adaptation policy is still in its infancy. In other words, it has not yet developed a robust adaptation policy; however, activities are growing fast, particularly in the field of research. This is relevant in the sense that adaptation needs a greater technical knowledge.

Conclusions

Both the mainstreamed and the stand-alone perspectives are valid and relevant, and each one has its virtues and criticisms. After reviewing both approaches, we could say that a hybrid or mixed model is the most suitable option to address adaptation planning and to achieve an effective adaptation. On one hand, when adaptation is mainstreamed, it can take advantage of the already existent institutions from other sectoral policies, such as disaster risk reduction, and create synergies to foster adaptation. It also implies a more comprehensive vision of the problem and its solution. However, merely mainstreaming of objectives or considerations is not always guarantee for its practice or implementation as in the case of water sector. The main criticism of this approach is that adaptation prerogatives run the risk of being diluted amongst the pressing objectives of the others sectors, without truly contributing to a change or transformation that can lead to improved adaptive capacity in that sector. Thus, it needs an extra coordination effort and greater awareness about the priority of adaptation.

On the other hand, given that the different policy fields might be insufficient to address all relevant adaptation issues, it may be required to strengthen issues related to adaptation through the creation of a new policy field. By treating it as an entirely separate field, adaptation could guide and boost the creation of new instruments, such as particular adaptation strategies in natural reserves or where new forms of governance for addressing climate change are required. The critical point in this aspect is coordination and communication to avoid institutional fragmentation and bureaucratic issues. Hence, adaptation requires to be mainstreamed but also to have an overarching framework that regulates, clarifies and defines its different aspects.

In summary, this research contributes to the need to have a broader idea on how adaptation can be constituted in practice. It also contributes to knowing what the trends and evolution of adaptation within public policies are, and its linkages with mitigation for establishing a greater synergy. Moreover, it verifies the degree of readiness of Mexico's public policies for adaptation and sets up a base line for future assessments.

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