

Adaptation in Global Climate Governance:

Linkages between Intergovernmental Dialogue Forums and the UNFCCC Regarding Adaptation

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Abstract

This paper investigates how intergovernmental dialogue forums addressing climate change outside of the UNFCCC are linked with the UNFCCC regarding their statements on adaptation. The discussed forums are the Major Economies Forum, G8, and G20. Three analytical points of comparison concerning the UNFCCC are established, namely: the UNFCCC gives adaptation the same priority as mitigation; there is increasing attention for the role of transnational actors in adaptation; and there is a clear distinction between the roles of developing and developed countries. A qualitative content analysis of forums' documents was conducted to investigate the nature of the linkages between statements related to adaptation. The key conclusion is that there is much overlap regarding adaptation statements between the dialogue forums and the UNFCCC, but there could be complementarity as regards certain adaptation subjects about which the forums made statements prior to the UNFCCC.

Keywords: UNFCCC; intergovernmental forums; climate change adaptation; global governance; institutional fragmentation.

I. Introduction

Climate change has been increasingly addressed in international institutions over the last few decades. The overall focus of international negotiations and discussions has been primarily on mitigating the anthropogenic impact, mainly through reducing and offsetting greenhouse gas emissions to such an extent that atmospheric concentrations would stabilise “at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system” (UNFCCC, 1992: 4). However, since the constitution of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) established an international platform to address climate change,

other aspects of climate change have been addressed progressively. One example is human adaptation to climate change effects on livelihoods. Although the UNFCCC is arguably considered as the main international platform for climate policy, other international institutions have been created by national governments to discuss climate change. The reasons to create new platforms outside of the UNFCCC vary, but the gridlock in climate negotiations in the period between the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement is a possible explanation for many (Keohane & Victor, 2011: 10). This gridlock can be largely attributed to the discussion about which countries should reduce emissions to what extent. New intergovernmental dialogue fo-

rums on climate (Weischer et al., 2012) therefore mainly address mitigation. The question arises, then, if and how these political dialogue forums discuss adaptation too, considering that the UNFCCC's Conference of the Parties has agreed to consider adaptation as important as mitigation (UNFCCC, 2011: 3). Concomitantly, it is useful to investigate whether there is a notable link between these dialogue forums and the UNFCCC regarding adaptation, as this could provide insights on, for instance, degrees of complementarity or overlap. This paper therefore addresses how intergovernmental dialogue forums, outside of the UNFCCC context, are linked to the UNFCCC with regards to their statements on adaptation. The term intergovernmental is used to indicate a restriction of this research to international institutions that involve national governments, thereby excluding transnational institutions. The intergovernmental institutions that are analysed are the Major Economies Forum on Energy and Climate (MEF), the G8, and the G20, as these institutions have been discussed as having similar purposes or functions in two separate articles addressing climate policy (Keohane & Victor, 2011 ; Weischer et al., 2012: 182). This allows for a robust comparison. The following section briefly discusses how adaptation is addressed within the UNFCCC in order to create a point of reference for the comparison with statements of other climate forums on adaptation. Subsequently, this paper addresses the academic debate on international climate change governance, including notions of climate regime complexes, climate clubs, and fragmentation. Then, based on the discussed literature, an analytical framework is presented, including the methodology, which is used to analyse the data of the several intergovernmental institutions. Lastly, key insights are discussed, considering also the limitations of this paper, after which a conclusion is given.

II. Literature review

II.1 Adaptation in the UNFCCC

Adaptation was included in the original UNFCCC founding document when parties committed to formulate and update programmes containing “measures to facilitate adequate adaptation to climate change” (UNFCCC, 1992: 5), as well as to “cooperate in preparing for adaptation” (ibid.). It was emphasised that developed countries shall assist vulnerable developing countries in “meeting costs of adaptation to [...] adverse effects [of

climate change]” (idem: 8). The programmes containing adaptation measures were further defined in the Kyoto Protocol as including “adaptation technologies and methods for improving spatial planning” which would advance adaptation (United Nations, 1998: 9). The Kyoto Protocol also established the clean development mechanism (CDM), of which a share of the proceeds would be used to assist developing countries in meeting adaptation costs (idem: 12). This ‘share’ was later, at the Sixth Conference of the Parties (COP6) in 2001, set as comprising a two per cent levy on CDM projects (Paavola & Adger, 2006). At the following COP7, a Least Developed Countries (LDC) work programme was established with special consideration for adaptation efforts in LDCs. Under this programme, a fund was established for LDCs (LDCF), which would provide additional adaptation finances next to the CDM levy, as well as an expert group (LEG) that could provide technical assistance (UNFCCC, 2013). This expert group would later be complemented by the Nairobi work programme aimed at facilitating adaptation knowledge and information (UNFCCC, 2012), as well as by the Adaptation Committee (AC), established through the Cancun Adaptation Framework in 2010. This AC focuses mainly on the actual implementation of adaptation policies (UNFCCC, 2014). Another decision related to the LDC programme was the establishment of the national adaptation programmes of action (NAPA), which are strategies that national governments have to base on existing knowledge and existing grassroots projects to address the most urgent areas where short-term adaptation is required. The aforementioned Cancun Adaptation Framework (CAF) established new principles for adaptation in the UNFCCC. For instance, as mentioned in the introduction, adaptation was now to be addressed with the same priority as mitigation (UNFCCC, 2011: 3). Also, adaptation for LDCs no longer only involved short-term actions, but also medium- and long-term programmes in the form of national adaptation programmes (NAPs; cf. NAPAs) (idem: 5). Related to this was a call for integration of adaptation practices into general national policies. Besides, the need to involve more stakeholders from both national and transnational levels in adaptation policies was recognised (idem: 3-4), which implies a shift away from full governmental responsibility for adaptation. Finally, most of the CAF's principles were included in the Paris Agreement, with the addition of urging countries to “submit and update periodically an adaptation communication” (UNFCCC,

2015: 26). In sum, the UNFCCC framework now includes an extensive and complex framework emphasising the importance of adaptation. It comprises multiple institutions such as the CAF, AC, LDCF and LEG, and involves the active participation of all parties to the UNFCCC in addressing adaptation to climate change, either through support to vulnerable countries or through formulating and implementing adaptation plans. Interestingly, the notion of adaptation in the UNFCCC has been extended to include features that fall outside of the ‘international climate’ context, such as the involvement of non-governmental actors in adaptation and the integration of adaptation in national policies that are not necessarily aimed at combating climate change.

II.II International Climate Governance: Fragmentation, Regime Complexes, and Climate Clubs

As aforementioned, there are many international institutions involved in global climate governance. This presence of many varying institutions within one policy area can be regarded as fragmentation, describing “a patchwork of international institutions that are different in their character [...], their constituencies [...], their spatial scope [...], and their subject matter” (Biermann et al., 2009a: 16). Indeed, Zelli (2011: 255) argues that “global climate politics is characterized by an advanced state of institutional diversity”.

He states that global climate governance is not restricted to institutions that specifically address climate change, but also involves institutions focusing on other subjects (idem: 256). According to him, there are four spheres in global climate governance with possible influences on global climate policies, with the central sphere being the UN climate regime (mainly consisting of the UNFCCC and all its related institutions). The second sphere includes multilateral forums (institutions) on climate and energy; the third sphere comprises international environmental institutions mainly concerned with other environmental issues than climate; and the fourth sphere consists of international non-environmental institutions (Figure 1). Although this depiction of institutional diversity or the term fragmentation in general may imply a preference for centrality (Zelli & Van Asselt, 2013: 3), fragmentation is not necessarily undesirable. Keohane & Victor (2011) argue that global climate policy consists of many international institutions, which they call ‘regimes’, and that regime complexes, characterised by loosely coupled regimes with an absence of an overall architecture, “have some distinctive advantages over integrated, comprehensive regimes” (idem: 19), such as flexibility across issues and adaptability over time in policymaking processes. They continue to argue that the UN endeavours to make the UNFCCC a comprehensive regime, whilst it

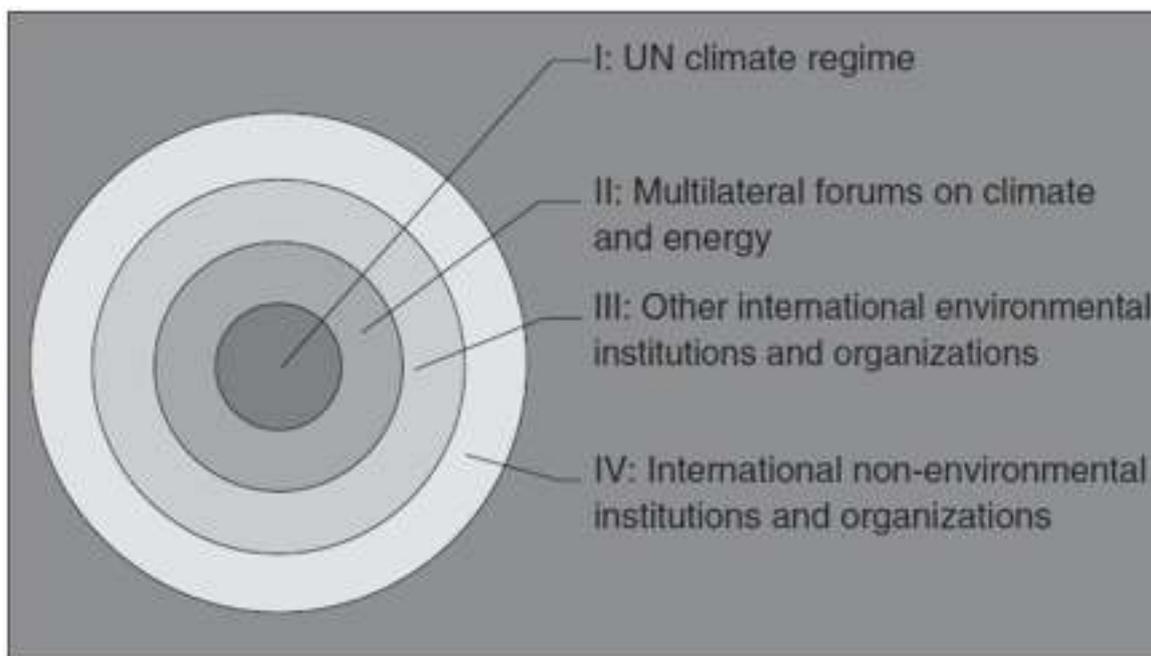


Figure 1. Spheres of institutional fragmentation in global climate governance (from Zelli, 2011). (Reprinted with permission from Zelli, 2011, p. 258, and Biermann et al., 2009b, p. 270. Copyright 2010 Cambridge University Press)

might be more beneficial to make the best out of the contemporary situation characterised by a high degree of fragmentation, because one overarching regime is highly unfeasible and not necessarily better in dealing with the issue at hand. Still, Keohane & Victor remain wary of promoting more fragmentation, as a regime complex also has liabilities such as higher transaction costs and possible conflicting overlaps between different institutions. The authors offer six criteria to assess a regime complex for functionality: coherence, accountability, determinacy, sustainability, epistemic quality, and fairness (idem: 16-17). Weischer and colleagues (2012) also imply that a diversity of multilateral institutions may be useful for increasing ambitions in climate change policies, specifically regarding mitigation. They address intergovernmental institutions which they refer to as 'climate clubs', which are "any grouping that comprises more than two and less than the full multilateral set of countries party to the UNFCCC and that has not reached the degree of institutionalization of an international organization" (idem: 177). Weischer and colleagues make a distinction between 'dialogue forums' and 'implementation groups', and define the primary purpose of dialogue forums as "information exchange and understanding country positions more deeply" (idem: 180, 182). Indeed, they argue that these forums may enable a better understanding of a country's positions and interests by other countries; may facilitate the sharing of best practices; and may support mitigation strategies. However, they conclude that current climate clubs do not trigger more ambition due to a lack of proper incentives to "turn ideas into declarations and actions plans into real action" (idem: 184). Keohane & Victor (2011) regard the MEF, G8, and G20 as climate clubs; Weischer and colleagues go further to distinguish them from other climate clubs as political dialogue forums. The MEF is regarded here as a Sphere II forum (see Figure 1; Zelli 2011), the other two as non-environmental forums (Sphere IV). Although Weischer and colleagues largely discuss these forums as addressing mitigation when referring to climate change, these forums also produce statements on adaptation. It is therefore relevant to see whether these statements could be regarded as, for instance, inspiring more ambition regarding adaptation.

III. Analytical Framework and Methodology

Based on the discussed literature and the highlighted adaptation activities within the UNFCCC, an analytical framework is established to investigate how intergovernmental dialogue forums are linked to the UNFCCC framework regarding their statements on adaptation. To this end, the UNFCCC is used as a point of reference to compare the other institutions with. Important aspects of comparison of UNFCCC statements regarding adaptation include: 1) adaptation is now given similar priority as mitigation; 2) there is increasing attention for non-state actors; and 3) concerning adaptation there still is a clear distinction between tasks of developed and developing countries, essentially meaning that developed countries have to assist developing countries in their formulation and implementation of required adaptation plans.

Although most of the discussed literature focuses on mitigation institutions in non-UNFCCC climate forums, the theoretical notions regarding these forums can also be used to discuss their efforts in addressing adaptation as the theories deal with their institutional characteristics and setting. The most important point to take from the discussed literature is that these intergovernmental climate forums can function variously in relation to the UNFCCC. For instance, it was argued that the positions and interests of countries regarding the subject at hand could be clarified in these forums. This would be beneficial for UNFCCC negotiations. More profoundly, according to Keohane & Victor (2011) the functionality of the regime complex, of which the UNFCCC is part, depends on certain criteria that characterise the complex of linkages between the various regimes. Fragmentation is an inherent feature of any global policy area, but the degree and nature of fragmentation can vary (Zelli, 2011).

Hence, the research focuses on describing the nature of the linkages between the investigated dialogue forum and the UNFCCC context regarding adaptation. Possible answers include that the forum's statements are complementary, conflicting, lacking, or overlapping. It is hypothesised that there is a fairly high degree of overlap, as most countries probably emphasise the importance of adaptation, especially in LDCs. However, it might also become clear that these forums have helped in harmonising this emphasis before UNFCCC negotiations, which would explain but overshadow the overlap in terms of relevance. Considering that these forums per definition do not include all UNFCCC members, the emphasis on either the role of developed countries or developing countries might be

different. Also, mitigation might still be the principal priority in these forums as emission issues are often the foundation for their formation.

In order to answer the posed questions, this research used qualitative content analysis of primary sources, in the form of official documents published by the intergovernmental dialogue forums. These were found on the websites of these forums and websites of summit databases (e.g. provided by the University of Toronto). Qualitative content analysis is an interpretative method of research, attempting to find “underlying themes in the materials being analysed” (Bryman, 2012: 557). This kind of interpretation is useful to analyse official documents that only provide ‘dry’ factual statements. The documents have been scrutinised for statements on adaptation or words related to adaptation, such as capacity building, vulnerability, and resilience. The research was conducted in December 2015 and January 2016.

IV. Data and Analysis

IV.I Major Economies Forum on Energy and Climate (MEF)

The MEF was formed in 2009 to provide a platform for ‘major economies’ to “help generate the political leadership necessary to achieve a successful outcome at the annual UN climate negotiations” (MEF, 2009a). In relation to the UNFCCC, the goal seems straightforward then: to complement the UNFCCC by harmonising the positions of major (national) economies beforehand. However, its statements on the importance of adaptation and the role of countries in dealing with adaptation may still vary. Statements have been retrieved from summaries of the meetings provided on the MEF website. At the first meeting of the MEF in April 2009, adaptation was mentioned briefly as being a subject of discussion (U.S. Department of State, 2009). During the second meeting the importance of adaptation was agreed upon, especially regarding adaptation in the most vulnerable countries (MEF, 2009b). This message was repeated at following meetings, including the third meeting when the “formulation and implementation of adaptation programs and their integration into national development plans” was supported (MEF, 2009c). At the sixth meeting of the MEF in 2010, the Cancun conference (COP16) was brought up for the first time, although it was only at the eight meeting that adaptation was mentioned as a major point for COP16 (MEF, 2010a). At

the ninth meeting, there was consensus on a need for strengthening existing adaptation institutions in the UNFCCC, but there were some different views on the necessity of a new adaptation institution (MEF, 2010b). In the tenth meeting, however, after the Cancun Adaptation Framework was established, there was a call for operationalising the Adaptation Committee (MEF, 2011).

Adaptation was largely not discussed, with the exception of few remarks, through meetings eleven to seventeen of the MEF (2011 to 2013). It was only at the eighteenth meeting in May 2014 that the importance of adaptation was addressed once again, in light of the upcoming Paris negotiations in 2015 (MEF, 2014a). The twentieth and 21st meeting also emphasised this as well as the importance of a possible Paris agreement to enhance adaptation efforts (MEF, 2014b; 2015a). The last documented meeting (at the time of writing), the 22nd in July 2015, mainly focused on how key issues, such as adaptation, would be represented in the Paris agreement. It was agreed once again that adaptation is important, but also that adaptation needs more prominence. However, it was stated that although adaptation is urgent, “elevating adaptation does not mean that mitigation and adaptation need to be treated the same way” (MEF, 2015b). The participants encouraged to interlink mitigation and adaptation, while also suggesting mainstreaming adaptation and increasing transparency regarding adaptation efforts.

IV.II Adaptation in the G8

The Group of Eight (G8, at the time of writing G7 but referred to here as G8) is a forum of major industrial democracies in which these countries “deal with the major economic and political issues facing their domestic societies and the international community as a whole” (G7 IC, 2014a). One of the main areas the G8 focuses on is Africa and its development, but the agenda of the summit has been consistently broadened to also include climate change. Keohane & Victor (2011: 10-11) report that between 2005 and 2011 every meeting of the G8 included a “prominent statement on climate change”. This research therefore starts with the G8 meeting in 2005, also to not extend the timeframe too much beyond the MEF meetings. The documents considered are summaries and declarations of the annual summits of the G8, retrieved from an information system provided by the University of Toronto. The 2005 Gleneagles Plan of Action on inter alia climate change

contains a section on adaptation, emphasising the need for supporting adaptation in developing countries (G7 IC, 2014b). Thereafter, adaptation was not mentioned again until 2008 at the G8 Hokkaido summit, during which it was recognised that “adaptation will play a correspondingly vital role” when discussing climate change and mitigation (G7 IC, 2011a; G7 IC, 2010). In 2010, a call for more research on adaptation was done, and a conference on adaptation was underlined (G7 IC, 2014c). In 2011, the outcomes of the Cancun conference were welcomed, including those on adaptation (G7 IC, 2011b). Although adaptation was not mentioned at the 2012 summit, the Cancun framework was supported (G7 IC, 2012). Adaptation was not addressed at the 2013 summit either, but it is noteworthy that the MEF was seen as a relevant forum and partner to work with towards Paris 2015 (G8, 2013: 14). In 2014 at the first G7 summit without Russia, adaptation needs of developing countries were once again mentioned, now in relation to the Copenhagen commitments to mobilise USD 100 billion per year by 2020 for mitigation and adaptation. The desired balance of this expenditure between those two policy domains was not addressed (G7, 2014; 2015).

IV.IV Statements on Adaptation in the G20

The Group of 20 (G20) began meeting in 1999 with the finance ministers and central bank governors of the participating countries (including the European Union). It was originally formed to discuss mainly economic and financial issues such as the financial crises in the late 1990s and 2000s; the latter crisis was the cause for the first annual summit of the countries’ leaders. Hence, the focus of the G20’s summits can be expected to be on the economic side of climate change when referring to this issue. Documents and statements have been retrieved mainly from the University of Toronto information system. The first G20 summit in Washington in 2008 primarily addressed the financial issues of that time and only stated that the leaders “remain committed to addressing [...] climate change” (G20 IC, 2012; similar statement in G20, 2009). It was not until the third summit in Pittsburgh – also the first summit to elaborate on the issue of climate change – that adaptation was mentioned as a necessary part of the Copenhagen agreement (G20 IC, 2011a; G20, 2010). In following summits, adaptation was only briefly addressed, but never elaborated, as being part of climate deals (G20, 2010b: 16; G20 IC, 2011b) or,

during the 2011 summit and like the G8 did in 2014, as being the target, next to mitigation, of a USD 100 billion dollar per year support from developed to developing countries. Again it was not clarified how large the share of that financial support for adaptation would be. At the 2012 summit, the G20 only mentioned adaptation regarding the necessity to adapt agriculture to climate change (G20, 2012: 10). In the next three summits, adaptation was only mentioned in 2014 again as a goal to mobilise funds for (G20, 2014: 3) or as part of a potential climate deal in Paris (G20, 2015: 6; 2013). Indeed, the focus of these last three summits was more on supporting the idea of an agreement in Paris under the UNFCCC. Overall the G20 repeatedly supports the outcomes of Conferences of the Parties and other UNFCCC statements or documents and “reaffirm[s] that UNFCCC is the primary international intergovernmental body for negotiating climate change” (G20, 2015: 6). This statement might explain the lack of elaboration on the subject of adaptation, even though climate change in general is often addressed in G20 documents.

V. Discussion

When drawing conclusions from this data some research limitations must be considered. For instance, what is written on paper does not perfectly reflect the underlying processes that were behind the statements presented by the intergovernmental institutions. Adaptation may have been discussed frequently during the summits or negotiations and may have been left out of the texts because naming it was not necessarily considered relevant. The absence of adaptation statements, be it deliberately or unintentionally, could say something, though, about how adaptation is not regarded as a major point to discuss elaborately. To investigate precisely how adaptation was addressed during these summits would require interviewing participants and scrutinising all output of these summits (not merely the summaries and declarations). This was, however, beyond the scope of this research. Related to this is that the individual inputs of countries participating in these forums have not been investigated, because this would also require a more profound research. Moreover, the UNFCCC point of reference was addressed elaborately but mainly included outputs of the major conferences, while the institutions formed by the UNFCCC such as the LEG and AC might have provided relevant statements as well. The point of reference may there-

fore be incomplete. Notwithstanding these limitations, some findings can be extracted from the research. Some general conclusions on all three dialogue forums can be drawn. Firstly, the three institutions frequently make clear that they support (most of the) outcomes of the UNFCCC negotiations and conferences, especially regarding adaptation in developing countries, leaving little room for adaptation to be discussed in a manner conflicting with UNFCCC statements. Secondly, climate change is repeatedly addressed as an important subject as well as adaptation, but adaptation is clearly less elaborately discussed, especially in the G20. The latter could be explained as the G20 is mainly an institution dealing with financial issues. However, the G20 apparently does find it important to discuss climate change in general, so the comparative question arises why adaptation is discussed less when it is regarded as very important in the UNFCCC. Thirdly, all three institutions seem to overlook the subject of transnational adaptation governance, with very few statements on non-state actors and adaptation. Fourthly, whenever they occur, the statements of the forums regarding adaptation seem to be very similar, both in comparison to the UNFCCC and to each other. For instance, they all repeatedly state the importance of adaptation and discuss the adaptation needs of developing countries. The overlap is hence clear but perhaps less relevant than the question whether these institutions have been complementary to the UNFCCC with regards to adaptation statements.

To this end, let us focus on the dialogue forums separately. The MEF seems to be largely supportive to the UNFCCC, as was the initial intention. Although many statements are often underlining UNFCCC text, the MEF may have had some influence on UNFCCC processes. For instance, the MEF emphasised the importance of integration of adaptation practices in 2009 already, and this was included in the UNFCCC CAF in 2010. Also, the MEF discussed increased transparency in 2015, before the Paris agreement included its requirement of more communication around adaptation. It remains unclear, though, whether this is solely attributable to countries of the MEF pushing for these aspects in the UNFCCC. A notable final statement of the MEF is that mitigation and adaptation should not be treated in the same way. Unfortunately, there is no elaboration on this point, as it would be valuable to know whether it could be conflicting with the notion that mitigation and adaptation are given the same

priority in the UNFCCC. As for the G8, in 2008 it stated that adaptation plays a role as vital as emission reductions. It also called for more research on the options for adaptation in June 2010. In November 2010, the CAF regarded adaptation with the same priority as mitigation and established the new AC which, for instance, shares knowledge on best practices regarding adaptation. Again, it cannot be established whether the creation of this institution and the CAF statement was initiated by the countries participating in the G8; this would require a more in-depth research of UNFCCC negotiations. However, it can be assumed that the G8 countries were in favour of these two examples of output. Also remarkably, the G8 mentioned the MEF as potential partner; it thus seems there are also linkages between the dialogue forums, which then again may make sense considering that many countries are parties to both forums.

Lastly, as aforementioned the G20 has not submitted many statements on adaptation, except for acknowledging UNFCCC texts. Accordingly, no unique statements were found that might have been regarded as either complementary to or conflicting with UNFCCC statements on adaptation.

VI. Conclusion

This paper set out to investigate how inter-governmental dialogue forums, outside of the UNFCCC, are linked to the UNFCCC regarding adaptation statements. Although the causality behind most of the alleged linkages between the UNFCCC and the three discussed intergovernmental dialogue forums cannot be confirmed, there are instances in which statements of one of the three dialogue forums were introduced later, in a paraphrased way, in UNFCCC documents. Exemplary topics include integration of adaptation, transparency of adaptation, and the importance of adaptation vis-à-vis mitigation, although the stance of the MEF on that last point is, remarkably, somewhat unclear. The discussed institutions all emphasise the importance of adaptation, and give great importance to adaptation in developing countries, therewith repeating the UNFCCC. This leads to little room for conflicting linkages, also between the three institutions. It is noteworthy, though, that transnational adaptation governance is largely ignored by the dialogue forums. A quite suggestive hypothesis for explaining this could be that the member states want to retain their influence and power over climate change policy, not allowing

the influence of transnational institutions to increase. This would be a good starting point for further research on the relation between intergovernmental and transnational climate governance. In sum, there is much overlap between the UNFCCC and the MEF, G8, and G20 regarding their statements on adaptation, but there may also be some complementarity of these dialogue forums on specific adaptation subjects.

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