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# Evaluating progress on loss and damage: an assessment of the Executive Committee of the Warsaw International Mechanism under the UNFCCC

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## ABSTRACT

The Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage Associated with Climate Change Impacts (WIM) was established in 2013, and its Executive Committee (ExCom) is developing a new five-year workplan. Seizing this opportune moment to assess institutional progress on the issue of loss and damage under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) we address two research questions: (1) Has the ExCom delivered on its workplans to date, and (2) how has the ExCom's progress varied across thematic areas? Drawing on public documentary sources, we assess the effectiveness and timeliness of the delivery of activities across five thematic areas: slow onset events; non-economic losses; comprehensive risk management approaches; human mobility; and finance, action and support. We find that there has been progress across the thematic areas, but that it has varied in pace. Delays are associated with activities from the two-year workplan being moved into the first five-year workplan or being devolved to the more recently established expert groups. Our results also show that decisions from the Conference of the Parties (COP) or the COP serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement (CMA) have played a critical role in accelerating specific aspects of the ExCom's work. Finally, we note that the ExCom is increasingly relying on its expert groups and their members to deliver many activities. This research advances our understanding of the nature and pace of progress on this issue, and raises new questions about the politics of global climate policy implementation.

## KEY POLICY INSIGHTS

- The WIM ExCom's workplans are characterized by broad goals and are ambiguous about start dates and deadlines. To enhance accountability, future workplans would benefit from clearly defined objectives, outcomes, and timelines.
- The workplans do not seem to constitute strong commitments: Parties make use of COP/CMA decisions to strengthen the workplans by mandating specific activities or deadlines, adding new activities and prioritizing among existing ones.
- The politics of implementation merits greater attention: wider political dynamics around loss and damage shape the pace of the ExCom's supposedly technical work. One example is the delayed establishment of the expert group on action and support.

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## 1. Introduction

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) recently acknowledged that human-induced climate change, including more frequent and intense extreme events, is already resulting in irreversible impacts and ‘losses and damages’ for vulnerable communities and countries (IPCC, 2022). Within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the negative impacts from climate change that breach adaptation limits are dealt with in the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage Associated with Climate Change Impacts (WIM). The WIM was established to address this area of climate policy through three key functions: (i) enhancing knowledge and understanding of comprehensive risk management approaches; (ii) strengthening dialogue, coordination, coherence and synergies among relevant stakeholders; and (iii) enhancing action and support to address loss and damage. The Paris Agreement (2015) included a stand-alone article on loss and damage (Article 8) and ensured that the WIM would be maintained in the post-2020 climate regime (UNFCCC, 2015a).

The work of the WIM is guided by an Executive Committee (ExCom) consisting of 20 representatives from Parties to the UNFCCC. The ExCom is formally a technical subsidiary body (referred to in practice as a constituted body) and is thus tasked to provide advice, technical input and expertise to advance the implementation of the Convention. Its activities are informed by workplans, which are carefully negotiated by ExCom members and agreed upon by the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the UNFCCC and/or the COP serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement (CMA). Following an initial two-year workplan (2015–2017) (UNFCCC, 2014), the ExCom agreed on a five-year rolling workplan (2018–2022) which is up for renewal in 2022. The 2018–2022 workplan is composed of five strategic workstreams focusing on: (a) slow onset events (SOEs); (b) non-economic losses (NELs); (c) comprehensive risk management approaches (CRM); (d) migration, displacement and human mobility; (e) action and support, including finance, technology and capacity-building. Five thematic groups have been established to support delivery of the ExCom’s workplan: (i) Expert group on Slow Onset Events; (ii) Expert group on Non-Economic Losses; (iii) Technical Expert Group on Comprehensive Risk Management (TEG-CRM); (iv) Task Force on Displacement (TFD); and (v) Expert group on Action and Support (ASEG) (UNFCCC, 2017).<sup>1</sup>

The WIM is the main vehicle for dealing with loss and damage under the Convention – and the ExCom its main governance body – yet, surprisingly, assessments of its work are lacking (McNamara & Jackson, 2019). Most studies focusing on the WIM investigate specific topics rather than assessing the work undertaken as a part of the WIM *per se*. For instance, Serdeczny (2019) discusses key characteristics of NELs and how to best develop measures to address them under the WIM; Gewirtzman et al. (2018) analyse approaches to financing loss and damage programmes identified by the initial two-year workplan; Nordlander et al. (2020) review insurance schemes for loss and damage as included in both workplans; and Janzen et al. (2021) review the literature on losses and damages to ecosystem services to facilitate better understanding, recognition, and uptake within the WIM. One exception is the policy paper by Byrnes and Surminski (2019), which discusses progress of work under the WIM in the context of its mandated review by Parties at COP25 in 2019 (see also UNFCCC, 2019a). Byrnes and Surminski (2019) match the activities identified in the 2016–2018 annual reports of the ExCom with the functions of the WIM and the activities outlined in five-year workplan. They find that most implemented activities fell into the first two functions of the WIM rather than delivering on the function of action and support. A similar approach is followed by Schäfer et al. (2021) with a specific focus on SOEs. This is important groundwork that our detailed, longitudinal assessment of the WIM ExCom builds on.

This article thus contributes to the literature by providing a fine-grained assessment of how work under the WIM has advanced since its establishment in 2013, by assessing progress in reference to both workplans. We focus on the ExCom as, to date, much of the work under the WIM has been developed, executed and/or overseen by the Committee. Building on Gutner and Thompson’s (2010) concept of ‘process-performance’, we assess whether and how the specific tasks the ExCom has set for itself have been carried out. We address two key research questions. First, has the ExCom delivered on its workplans? Second, how has the ExCom’s progress varied across thematic areas? Focusing on internal, bureaucratic processes does not necessarily help us understand whether the WIM will be able to effectively support vulnerable countries in addressing losses and

damages. However, this assessment is a critical first step in identifying the extent of progress made, including where such progress has been relatively slow-paced. In this way, we can identify potential barriers to achieving effective, legitimate and needs-led governance in this area of climate policy.

In addition, this research can also support the ongoing global stocktake of the Paris Agreement (GST), which assesses the world's collective progress towards achieving the purpose of the agreement and its long-term goals. Finally, this article offers a modest contribution to literature on the role of international bureaucracies in global politics. Path-breaking work by Martha Finnemore and Michael Barnett laid the foundation for studying the (dys)functions, power and influence of international organizations (Barnett & Finnemore, 1999; Finnemore & Barnett, 2004) but there has been limited application of the concepts and methodologies developed in this field to the study of the UNFCCC (but for important exceptions see, e.g. Lohan, 2006a, 2006b).

The article is structured as follows. Section 2 discusses the methodological approach and research design of the study. Results are presented in Section 3 and discussed in Section 4. Section 5 concludes by highlighting the contributions and caveats and offers suggestions for further research.

## 2. Method and material

We assess the ExCom against the *activities* and *timelines* it established for itself through its workplans, or through decisions mandated by the UNFCCC COP or CMA. We therefore focus on what Gutner and Thompson (2010, p. 235) call 'process performance', which is the ability of an organization to successfully carry out the specific tasks and narrow actions the organization is intended to perform. As such, we do not focus on macro, external outcomes nor evaluate the nature of the activities implemented (including their ambition), but only assess whether they have been carried out as internally planned. We recognize that the tasks the WIM ExCom agree upon could be understood as lowest common denominator agreements because of both the contentious nature of decision-making in the loss and damage space (see Calliari et al., 2020) and the fact that decisions in the UNFCCC are taken by consensus.

Our baseline is the themes that have constituted the focus of the ExCom's work in both the two-year and five-year rolling workplans. The two-year workplan was organized around nine 'action areas', while the current five-year workplan is composed of five 'strategic workstreams'. As detailed in Annex 1 (see Supplementary Material), we identify overlapping themes in the two plans and define five thematic areas for our assessment: SOEs; NELs; CRM; human Mobility; and finance, action and support. In addition to the activities, timeframes and deadlines outlined in the two workplans, the baseline also includes activities mandated to the ExCom by COP/CMA decisions.

We are interested in two standard performance criteria: effectiveness and timeliness of delivery. 'Effectiveness' tracks the extent to which immediate objectives are achieved. 'Timeliness' considers if results have been delivered in a timely manner. Acknowledging that other criteria have been proposed in the literature for the evaluation of projects, programmes and policies (see OECD, 2019<sup>2</sup>), we suggest that the relative weight and appropriateness of specific criteria highly depends on both the context and the aims of the evaluation. In the case of the WIM ExCom, criteria like relevance ('is the intervention doing the right thing?') and coherence ('how well does the intervention fit with other interventions within and outside the UNFCCC?') are inescapably political and can lead to radically different conclusions when adopting the perspective of different UNFCCC Parties or civil society observers. For these reasons we chose a narrow focus for the assessment: to evaluate if the ExCom has delivered on what it had agreed. This approach avoids the 'eye of the beholder' problem in relation to whether the work has been successful (Gutner & Thompson, 2010). Similarly, we put aside other criteria like impact and sustainability; we acknowledge these are important, but they are concerned with macro-outcomes rather than internal processes, which are our focus.

We establish three categories to capture whether an activity has been delivered as planned/mandated (effectiveness): (i) delivered; (ii) partly delivered; (iii) not delivered. We use category (ii) when the activity was actually constituted by a number of sub-activities, not all of which have been implemented in the defined time-frame. With respect to the timeliness of activity delivery, we distinguish among the following: (i) whether there has been a delay by the ExCom in starting/explicitly considering the activity; (ii) whether there has been a delay in implementing the activity, based on the indicative deadline set by the ExCom or respective expert group; and

iii) whether the activity was concluded on-time (according to the ExCom's own deadline or one that was mandated by COP/CMA decisions). It is worth noting that the two- and the five-year workplans establish indicative dates (e.g. an ExCom meeting) or periods (e.g. 2019–2021) for the ExCom to 'consider/start' activities (UNFCCC, 2014, 2017) but do not often indicate deadlines for their completion.

Our assessment involves triangulating different sources of data. In total, we reviewed about 630 publicly available documents found on the UNFCCC website. These documents included the WIM ExCom's Annual Reports from 2015 to 2021; relevant COP/CMA decisions; documents from the reviews of the WIM undertaken at COP22 in 2016 and COP25 in 2019; event websites of WIM-related meetings and events; meeting minutes and reports; technical papers; participant lists; and presentations. In addition to the documentation available on the UNFCCC websites, we also analysed the meeting notes produced by the Research and Independent Non-Governmental Organisations (RINGO) constituency for ExCom meetings 6 to 14, which took place between 2017 and 2021.

### 3. Results

Our research suggests that there has been progress across the WIM ExCom's thematic areas, but activity implementation has varied in pace. Below, we provide a comprehensive overview of the performance of the ExCom in delivering on the five-year rolling workplan and the initial two-year workplan. As shown in Annex 2 (see Supplementary Material), the two-year workplan included 24 activities: 13 of these were delivered, one was merged with another activity, and seven were postponed either by being carried over to the five-year workplan ( $n = 4$ ) or by being paused while waiting for the establishment of the relevant expert group ( $n = 3$ ). The remainder ( $n = 3$ ) included the identification of follow-up activities as appropriate, but to our knowledge no steps were taken in this respect. All activities under the NELs; human mobility; and finance, action and support thematic areas were delivered, while five activities out of eight under the CRM thematic area were postponed. Finally, in the SOE thematic area, half of the activities were delivered ( $n = 2$ ) and half were carried over to the five-year workplan ( $n = 2$ ).

The five-year workplan saw an increase in the number of discrete activities ( $n = 37$ ), of which 17 are directly allocated to the ExCom and 20 were ultimately moved to the action plans of the relevant expert groups (see Table 1). Under this workplan, the ExCom fully delivered on six activities and delivered partly on two. Three other activities are still ongoing (one in conjunction with an expert group) and five activities were not launched (according to the documents we analysed). A final activity included the identification of follow-up actions in the context of SOEs, but according to the documentation available no activities have yet been identified. CRM was the thematic area featuring the highest number of activities ( $n = 12$ ), of which two were delivered by the ExCom and nine were moved to the TEG-CRM expert group established in the second half of December 2019. One of the activities under this workstream is jointly carried out by the ExCom and the expert group. According to the TEG-CRM plan of action, three activities were delivered, five have been partly delivered – with some of them experiencing delays because of the COVID-19 pandemic – and two are ongoing at the time of writing. Similarly, out of six activities in the NELs thematic areas, five have been assigned to the NELs expert group and are ongoing.

SOEs and finance, action and support are the areas where most activities have been carried out directly by the ExCom rather than the respective expert groups. In the area focusing on SOEs, the ExCom delivered on one activity, delivered partly on another, has not yet started one activity and assigned one activity to the expert group, meaning that it is ongoing until the expert group concludes it. On finance, action and support, the ExCom delivered two activities and partly delivered on one. Two other activities remain ongoing and three have not yet started. In the thematic area of human mobility, work was carried out by the TFD, either alone or in conjunction with the ExCom, while the activity assigned to the ExCom only (Activity 3) has not yet started.

Before analysing these results, it is worth noting that the very different nature, scale and scope of the activities included in each thematic area – from sending invitations to enhancing knowledge – limits the possibilities for any meaningful quantitative comparison both across thematic areas within the same workplan and between the same thematic areas in the two workplans. Moreover, comparability across the workplans is impeded by the different ways in which they were developed. The two-year workplan includes an 'indicative timeline' which is

**Table 1.** Overview of the WIM ExCom's implementation of the five-year rolling workplan.

Thematic Area – Activities	2018 (Jan-Jun) /ExCom7	2018 (July- Dec)/ExCom8	2019 (Jan-Jun) /ExCom9	2019 (July- Dec)/ExCom10	2020 (Jan-Jun) /ExCom11	2020 (July- Dec)/ExCom12	2021 (Jan-Jun) /ExCom13	2021 (July- Dec)/ExCom14
<b>SOEs (WS (a))</b>								
1) Continue ongoing work carried over from two-year workplan	→						PD	
2) Establish expert group (EG)	→					D		
3) Organise technical meeting between expert groups on SOE and CRM		→	→					
4) Facilitate development of information tools and the integration into national planning and policy processes				→	→			
5) Identify follow up actions								
<b>NELs (WS (b))</b>								
1) Re-establish the expert group	→					D		
2) Develop an awareness raising strategy		→						
3) Invite the NEL expert group to synthesise information and make the information available		→						
4) The NEL expert group to work with TFD to develop guidelines						→		
5) Foster partnerships with relevant stakeholders						→		
6) Invite partners to coordinate capacity building events at regional and national levels						→		
<b>CRM (WS (c))</b>								
1) Establish TEG-CRM	→			D				
2a) The ExCom through TEG-CRM to: (a) identify gaps and methodologies that can be used by national governments		→				PD		
2b) Collect feedback on compendium developed under two-year workplan			→				D	
2c) Consult with expert to prepare paper from two-year workplan			→				PD	
2d) Provide information on transformational approaches				→			PD	
2e) Identify contribution of Clearing House for Risk Transfer to ExCom and TEG-CRM				→				
3) Invite TEC to discuss joint work with the ExCom	→					D		
4a) Facilitate stakeholder engagement through coordination with research organisations to facilitate capacity-building		→		D				
4b) Invite WMO to provide information on the user interface platform		→		PD				
4c) Invite relevant organisations to discuss capacity-building needs		→		D				
<b>CRM (WS (c)) continuation</b>								
5) Facilitate the development and dissemination of guidance			→	→		PD		
6) Collect awareness-raising strategies, related knowledge products and methodologies to enhance CRM to be accessible by national government		→						
<b>Migration and displacement (WS (d))</b>								
1) TFD to continue its work and develop recommendations		D →						
2) Disseminate the TFD recommendations		D	→					
3) Invite experts and organisations to collaborate with ExCom to share information			→					
4) Enhance the catalytic role of the WIM through the ExCom				→				
5) Invite partners and relevant stakeholders to identify capacity needs				→				
<b>Action and support (WS (e))</b>								
1a) Produce technical paper referred to in decision 4/CP.22, paragraph 2(f) and (g)	→		D					
1b) Invite the Standing Committee on Finance (SCF) to continue collaboration with ExCom				→				
1c) Invite relevant actors to consider how to facilitate the availability of finance		→						
2a) Invite the Paris Committee on Capacity-building (PCCB) and other actors to identify capacity gaps.	PD →							
2b) Invite relevant actors to organise regional stakeholder workshops		→						
2c) Invite the Durban Forum on capacity building		→						
2d) Develop actions to address capacity building for addressing loss and damage on the basis of the recommendations emerging from a-c					→			
3) Engage stakeholders to develop knowledge and support dissemination of good practices, including insurance mechanisms		→						
4) Identify follow up activities as appropriate (e.g., establish an expert group)				→		D		
<b>Legend</b>								
→	Activity due to be considered according to the five-year rolling workplan							Work carried out by EG
D	Activity Delivered according to ExCom reporting							Work carried out jointly between EG and ExCom
PD	Activity Partly Delivered according to ExCom reporting							Activity reported in documentation, but no further information of progress found

to be understood as ‘tentative’ and ‘intended to serve as a basis for scheduling meetings and the overall work of the Executive Committee’ (UNFCCC, 2014), while the five-year workplan indicates only a starting date in the form of an ‘Indicative Executive Committee meeting(s)’ for the ExCom ‘to consider/start the activity’ (UNFCCC, 2017). The formulation of the latter is particularly vague. The lack of clear timeframes or deadlines

within which outputs should be produced makes it challenging to compare progress and timeliness across workplans.

Yet, some important general observations can be made. First, both workplans were characterized by delays in the implementation of related activities. Many activities in the two-year workplan were carried over into the five-year workplan because they were either not completed or not commenced. In turn, many activities under the five-year workplan were paused while waiting for the establishment of the relevant expert group. For example, work on NELs was listed as a priority for 2019–2021 but only began in 2020 after delays in establishing the expert group. In fact, the process of establishing the expert groups for NELs and SOEs took almost three years. Decision 2/CMA.2 in 2019 gave a further prompt to the ExCom to accelerate the establishment of expert groups. The same decision also requested the ExCom to establish an expert group on action and support (also launched in 2020) (UNFCCC, 2019b). Even the now relatively well-established TEG-CRM had a delayed start: the terms of reference for the group were agreed in 2016 but it took three years for it to be established. The case of the TFD is different. Mandated by COP21 (UNFCCC, 2015b) and launched shortly thereafter, the TFD started its work before the launch of the five-year workplan and has been particularly prolific in delivering a significant volume of outputs, publications and research (UNFCCC, not dated; UNFCCC, 2021b; see also UNFCCC, 2022a) and has often been held up as a model of how the other expert groups should operate.

Second, the assessment of the workplans reveals that COP and CMA decisions have played a key role in accelerating specific aspects of the ExCom's work. In addition to the example of Decision 2/CMA.2 in hastening the establishment of the SOEs, NELs and ASEG expert groups, Decision 4/CP.22 called for the timely delivery of the technical paper under the finance, action and support thematic area (UNFCCC, 2016a). In fact, the establishment of the ASEG and the finalization of the technical paper were the only activities in the five-year workplan that had specific deadlines and were delivered on time. COP/CMA decisions acted as an external prompt to adjust the ambition of the ExCom's work, notably on issues that seemed to be progressing most slowly and/or were deemed most important (at least for some Parties), such as action and support. The only other case where deadlines were established was within some expert groups' plans of action as deadlines were set by the members of the expert group themselves (e.g. TEG-CRM).

A third general observation can be made on the role of expert groups in carrying out ExCom activities. Expert groups are composed of individuals nominated by relevant organizations or invited by the Committee to become members on the basis of their thematic, regional or transdisciplinary expertise (UNFCCC, 2021a). These individuals represent a wide range of backgrounds and affiliations, but particularly international organizations and research/academia. They voluntarily devote their time and resources to contribute to the ExCom's activities and play a key role in the development of knowledge products on loss and damage. Key examples are the outputs of the TEG-CRM (e.g. the Compendium on Comprehensive Risk Management Approaches) and the reports produced by the TFD. While such outsourcing of activities might be a common approach amongst committees within the UNFCCC, this reliance on external actors raises questions about the drivers and ownership of the outputs; the ExCom's knowledge production efforts depend substantially on external resources and alignment with the priorities of other organizations.

Sections 3.1 to 3.5 below provide a detailed description of how activities have progressed across the thematic areas with a special emphasis on the five-year workplan and the activities carried over from the two-year workplan.

### **3.1. ExCom's performance on SOEs**

Under the five-year workplan, the ExCom reported the delivery of one activity – the establishment of the SOE expert group – which began in the first part of 2018 and was finalized two years later as mandated by a CMA decision (as discussed above). The activities carried over from the two-year workplan were partly delivered as the ExCom reported that it had maintained the database on SOE organizations set up under the two-year workplan. The ExCom also convened a special issue on SOEs published in 2021 in the journal 'Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability' featuring 28 peer-reviewed articles edited by Adamo et al. (2021). However, part of the work pending from the two-year workplan included the development of SOE-related

recommendations to the COP which have not yet been delivered. Moreover, Activity 4 on facilitating the development of information tools was moved to the plan of action of the SOE expert group (UNFCCC, 2021c, 2021d).

The ExCom did not report any progress on two of its SOE activities. Activity 3, which concerned the organization of a technical meeting between the expert groups on SOEs and CRM, was due to be considered by the ExCom in late 2018/early 2019. However, with the former being established in 2020 and the latter in late 2019 this objective was not met and this activity has not been further reported on. Finally, the ExCom did not identify any follow-up actions.

### **3.2. ExCom's performance on NELs**

Under the two-year workplan, the ExCom had organized a side event 'Shining the light on non-economic losses: challenges, risks and lessons learned for addressing them' to raise awareness of NELs. The event took place during the intersessional climate conference (SB44) in May 2016 (UNFCCC, 2016b). The ExCom also established a NELs expert-group, which met once in September 2016 (UNFCCC, 2016c). At this meeting, it produced a draft workplan, but no further meetings were mentioned in the documents we analysed.

Under the five-year workplan, the ExCom reported initiating all six activities listed in this workstream, yet reported delivering only one of them, the re-establishment of NELs expert group, to date. This work was initiated at the 7th meeting of the ExCom (ExCom 7) in 2018. At ExCom 9 in 2019 it was reported to be a priority for the Committee (UNFCCC, 2019c). At ExCom 12 in 2020, the new Terms of Reference were presented and the expert group was officially established in 2020 (UNFCCC, 2020a) with its first meeting taking place in March 2021.

The other five agreed activities in this workstream were moved to the workplan of the re-established expert group. While two activities were originally due to begin in the second half of 2018, the ExCom moved them into the action plan of the expert group. Activities 4–6 were considered priorities in the five-year rolling workplan, but they were all moved into the expert group's plan of action and the evidence we examined suggests they are yet to be completed at the time of writing.

### **3.3. ExCom's performance on CRM**

Under the two-year workplan, the ExCom produced a compendium of CRM approaches. Its first draft was ready by ExCom5 in 2017, after which the ExCom invited stakeholders, including international organizations, Parties, civil society, UN bodies and academia, to provide feedback. The activity of facilitating a review of the compendium was carried over to the five-year rolling workplan as a joint endeavour with the CRM expert group whose establishment had been postponed.

The workstream on CRM in the five-year workplan has six activities. However, Activities 2 and 4 involve four and three sub-activities respectively. So far, the ExCom has reported that two activities (Activities 1 and 3) have been delivered solely by the ExCom. Activity 3 focused on establishing a collaboration between the ExCom and the Technology Executive Committee (TEC), which is the policy arm of the Technology Mechanism in the UNFCCC. This activity was initiated as planned and work progressed steadily until June 2019, when the TEC and the ExCom held an expert dialogue on 'Technologies for averting, minimising and addressing loss and damage in coastal zones' (UNFCCC, 2019d). After the event, the ExCom and TEC continued working to develop a policy brief which was published in June 2020 (UNFCCC, 2020b). The other activity that was reported as delivered by the ExCom is the establishment of a CRM expert group, which was finalized with the launch of the TEG-CRM in the second half of 2019 (UNFCCC, 2019e).

Ten of the activities in the five-year rolling workplan were moved under the work of the TEG-CRM rather than being directly carried out by the ExCom. The ExCom reported having started considering seven activities before either moving them to the TEG-CRM or carrying them out jointly. Three of them were moved into the TEG-CRM's plan of action before being considered. Of the activities that were moved from the ExCom's workplan to the TEG-CRM's action plan, three were reported as delivered and four others were reported as partly delivered. For example, the TEG-CRM delivered on organizing the 'stakeholder engagement workshop on strengthening the capacities for observation and risk assessment in the context of loss and damage associated with



climate change' in 2019 and on finalizing the compendium on risk management approaches (UNFCCC, 2019f, 2019g). It is worth noting that when activities were moved from the ExCom's workplan to the TEG-CRM's action plan, deadlines for some activities were established. According to the documents we examined, some of them are lagging behind (in orange, see Table 1) because of the COVID-19 pandemic (UNFCCC, 2021e).

### **3.4. ExCom's performance on human mobility**

Under the two-year workplan, the ExCom had two key activities. The first involved inviting relevant organizations and experts to provide scientific information on the topic. The ExCom initiated work on time, drafting invitations to relevant actors at ExCom 2 in 2016 and sending them out later that year. The ExCom received 19 inputs from organizations and experts. As a second activity, the ExCom was tasked with inviting UN organizations, expert bodies and other initiatives to collaborate. Work was initiated on time and, based on the responses received from the first activity, some ExCom members were involved in an International Organization for Migration-led technical meeting on migration, displacement and human mobility in July 2016 (UNFCCC, 2016d).

In the five-year workplan, activities have been building on the work the TFD has been carrying out since its establishment. Differently from other expert groups, the TFD was established by a COP decision in 2015 and thus independently from the ExCom's workplan. Consequently, the ExCom's five-year workplan was shaped by the TFD. As a result, all but one of the activities in this workstream were carried out by the TFD or jointly by the TFD and the ExCom. The one activity under the sole responsibility of the ExCom has not yet started.

Two of the activities were reported as delivered. The dotted diagonal line in the table indicates where the ExCom and TFD have worked together on an activity. The ExCom reported that the TFD and the ExCom both progressed Activity 1 and 2. Activity 1, which was about developing recommendations, was concluded when the COP endorsed them in 2018. The second activity was about disseminating the TFD's recommendations. This was done through two side events organized by the ExCom and the TFD at COP24 in 2018 ('Recommendations of the Task Force of Displacement') and COP25 in 2019 ('Moving forward together: averting, minimising and addressing displacement – the second phase of the Task Force of Displacement') as well as through summary reports on the UNFCCC website (UNFCCC, 2019g; UNFCCC, 2019h; UNFCCC, 2019i).

Two activities were reported by the ExCom as started and as being carried out by the TFD. These activities are about enhancing the catalytic role of the WIM and inviting partners to identify relevant capacity needs featured as ExCom's priority areas for 2019–2021. Here, the ExCom endorsed the TFD's updated plan of action in 2019, which contains several activities on promoting dialogue, compiling good practice case studies, and promoting capacity building (UNFCCC, 2021b). While the ExCom has reported that work on these activities has started and is being carried out, it has not yet reported them as delivered.

It is worth noting that, during the implementation period of the ExCom's five-year workplan, the TFD has also implemented its own plan of action. Those TFD activities have not been included in this assessment as they were not formally mentioned in the ExCom's workplan.

### **3.5. ExCom's performance on finance, action and support**

Work on action and support, including finance, technology and capacity-building, was not included as an independent action area under the two-year workplan, but instead as cross-cutting the work on CRM (see Annex 1 in Supplementary Material). In the five-year rolling workplan, action and support has its own dedicated workstream with five activities. While this workstream was not initially considered a priority, the lack of progress on this topic attracted much criticism at the 2019 review of the WIM (UNFCCC, 2019j) and (in combination with a COP decision mandating work in this area) the ExCom subsequently became more active.

The ExCom reported one activity as partly delivered and two activities as delivered. Interestingly, both activities that were delivered in this workstream had specific deadlines. Activity 1a concerned the development of a technical paper originally mandated by COP22 in 2016. While the work concerning this activity started with a slight delay, the technical paper 'Elaboration of the sources of and modalities for accessing financial support for

addressing loss and damage’ was produced by the UNFCCC Secretariat and published in June 2019 (UNFCCC, 2019k).

The other activity that was reported as delivered was not fully defined when the five-year workplan was initially drafted. Consequently, during the 2019 WIM review, the ExCom was criticized for not progressing on this workstream (UNFCCC, 2019l), and a subsequent CMA decision mandated the establishment of an Expert Group on Action and Support (ASEG) (UNFCCC, 2019b). As this was related but external to the five-year workplan, we assessed it under Activity 4 about identifying follow-up activities. The ExCom established the ASEG in 2020. The group first met in May 2021 and started drafting its plan of action.

The activity which was reported as partly delivered concerned capacity building. In Activity 2a, the ExCom progressed on its work to liaise with the Paris Committee on Capacity-building (PCCB). In 2019, the ExCom was invited to participate in the side event ‘the 2nd Capacity Building Hub – Loss and Damage block’ (UNFCCC, 2019m). The other two activities on capacity building (2c and 2d) have not been reported upon during the assessment period. Moreover, the ExCom never reported on Activity 2b, which concerned organizing regional stakeholder workshops.

During the period of the assessment, the ExCom began considering three activities. Activity 1b was about collaborating with the Standing Committee on Finance (SCF). This activity progressed as ExCom members liaised with members of the SCF, and continued doing so, during ExCom 8 in 2018, ExCom 9 in 2019, and ExCom 11 in 2020. At ExCom 13 in 2021, the activity was absorbed into the workplan of the newly established expert group. Additionally, the ExCom reported starting to consider Activity 1c, on inviting actors to facilitate the availability of finance for loss and damage at ExCom 8 in 2018, but the documentation we analysed does not suggest any development in this respect. Finally, Activity 3 on stakeholder engagement was reported to start according to the workplan’s indicative schedule. The ExCom considered this activity as cross-cutting between the TFD and TEG-CRM in 2018, and it was not reported on again. However, the 2019 review of the ExCom suggested a need for the Committee to improve its stakeholder engagement.

#### 4. Discussion

This article provides a detailed assessment of the ExCom’s performance, with a particular emphasis on the work undertaken within the five-year workplan. The research shows that the ExCom did not leave any activity in the two-year workplan behind: they were delivered or carried over to the five-year workplan. In the five-year workplan, more than half of the activities have been or are currently being implemented by the expert groups, while the ExCom has been progressing on around two-thirds of the activities it has been tasked with. Yet the evidence suggests that the Committee has failed to start on the remaining activities.

The assessment shows progress in implementing the activities of the five-year workplan; however, it does not make any normative claims about the merit of these activities. The diversity of activities that have been included in the workplans makes it difficult to judge on the overall ambition within and across thematic areas. Moreover, the concept (and metrics) of ambition can vary across stakeholders. Indeed, some observers have commented on the limited levels of ambition on work on loss and damage (Mace & Verheyen, 2016). We confront this problem with a process-focused perspective by employing the ExCom workplans as a baseline, and thus by assessing the ExCom against the goals it established for itself.

While our methodological approach enables us to trace what the ExCom has delivered, it also has limitations. First, drawing on solely publicly available documentation does not show work that might have occurred in informal processes. As such, it is possible that activities and outputs have been delivered or begun without having been mentioned in the documentation. Second, official documentation does not always capture the discussion around activities or indicate how the planning of activities is shaping up in detail, and as such we are only able to assess if an activity has been carried out as planned rather than how it was carried out.

Yet, by maintaining a focus on the ExCom’s tasks, we were nevertheless able to find traces of wider dynamics that can help us better understand its work. For instance, we highlighted how Parties can influence the work of the ExCom by mandating specific activities or setting deadlines. Politics, we suggest, can also explain to a certain extent why some expert groups were slower to be established: some topics under the WIM are more politically contentious than others. For instance, Calliari et al. (2020) suggest that concerns from developed

country negotiators about compensation and liability claims can help to explain limited progress around finance, action and support (even though the evidence suggests a steep decline in mentions of compensation). Contention around finance for loss and damage can potentially help explain why the establishment of the ASEG was delayed and why this ultimately had to be specifically mandated through a CMA decision. Conversely, the technical way in which climate-related migration has been framed in the UNFCCC mirrors the way it had been discussed and debated within the scientific, humanitarian and advocacy communities that played a key role in introducing the topic into UNFCCC negotiations (McNamara et al., 2018; Serdeczny, 2017; Warner, 2012; 2018). The fact that the TFD was promptly established after COP21 and the way it became a model for how other expert groups should operate, can thus be understood as a result, among other factors, of how it has been framed in climate talks.

This article also makes a methodological contribution by highlighting the value of an in-depth process-oriented assessment. We see this as an important foundation for understanding where progress has stalled and identifying some of the reasons why. This internally-oriented assessment could be complemented by an externally-focused approach which seeks to address the real-world impacts of the ExCom's work including understanding the extent to which target audiences are relying on its outputs and engaging with its events and processes. While this would involve grappling with issues of causality and attribution of outcomes to the ExCom's work (Carraro, 2019; Gutner & Thompson, 2010), our work takes an important first step in raising these questions.

## 5. Conclusions

Our focus on internal processes highlights the challenges of designing and delivering on workplans to address the wide range of complex issues grouped under the loss and damage banner. There are lessons for practitioners involved in the development of the WIM ExCom's next workplan. Our evidence suggests that, under certain conditions, agreement to deliver an activity is not always sufficient for the initiation of (or progress on) those activities. We found that activities that had been stalled or delayed were accelerated when: (a) a COP/CMA decision explicitly mandated the ExCom with that activity; (b) deadlines were established; and/or (c) an expert group took ownership of the activity. The delays in delivering on many of the activities – and the nature of some of those activities – raise questions about resourcing, capacity and political will which future research could explore further.

In general, our findings highlight the need for further research on the political context within which the ExCom works. This study evaluated the ExCom's performance based on publicly accessible documentation from the WIM ExCom. During the research process, it became clear that this approach cannot capture internal ExCom dynamics, which are not reflected in the documents, including interactions at meetings (both open and closed ones). Further research exploring the power dynamics between actors would enable us to better understand how, for instance, the workplans are negotiated, and what this negotiation process means for the ExCom and its ambition to meet its mandate. Further research could also help us better explain why some activities were stalled while others were carried out, as well as why, compared to the TFD and TEG-CRM, it took longer to establish the expert groups focusing on NELs, SOEs and action and support.

Additionally, we found that the ExCom delegated many of the activities in its workplan to the expert groups. Our study scope did not extend to assess the performance of these groups for two reasons: (1) some of the expert groups have only been operational since 2021, so it may be too early to evaluate their progress; and (2) as the expert groups are distinct from and clearly subordinate to the ExCom, we prioritized assessing the ExCom as the unit responsible for guiding the implementation of the functions of the Loss and Damage mechanism. However, a clear next step for work in this realm would be to evaluate progress across the different expert groups.

Another point of future research would be to contrast the WIM ExCom's workplans with other committees in the UNFCCC. For example, the Adaptation Committee sought to make their most recent workplan (2022–2024) more flexible by focusing on priority areas over shorter timescales, rather than specific activities over a five-year period (UNFCCC, 2022b). This raises questions in the development of these types of workplans about the balance between being prescriptive about specific activities versus focusing on the bigger picture.

## Notes

1. COP20 in 2014 mandated the ExCom with the establishment of advisory expert groups, subcommittees, panels, thematic advisory groups or task-focused ad hoc working groups (UNFCCC, [not dated b](#)). While the ExCom established the expert groups on SOEs, NELs, CRM and action and support, the TFD was established separately by COP21 and operationalized by the WIM ExCom (UNFCCC, [2022c](#)).
2. For instance, the OECD DAC Network on Development Evaluation (EvalNet) has defined six evaluation criteria which in addition to effectiveness include relevance, coherence, impact, sustainability, and efficiency (OECD, [2019](#)).

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