



A practical approach to addressing barriers to national climate adaptation policy in the UK

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Climate adaptation policy in the UK is ineffective and fails to address the many barriers to implementing adaptation in practice. As climate change impacts are increasing, there is an urgent need to address these barriers. Focusing on England, this policy brief provides a practical approach to systematically understand and address these barriers for policymakers and practitioners who operationalise national adaptation policy.

Overview

- Barriers to national adaptation policy are a major reason for the lack of adaptation action.
- Working with stakeholders, we identified ten key barriers to the National Adaptation Programme (NAP) in England and mapped their mechanisms, including origins, influences, and relationships.
- Using this map, we show how to develop practical solutions to adaptation policy problems and related barriers.
- We recommend that NAP practitioners should consider the barriers in the NAP process and develop solutions based on a deeper understanding of these barriers.

Urgent need to tackle barriers to national adaptation policy

The UK National Adaptation Programme (NAP) has been in operation since the Climate Change Act (2008), to address the climate change risks and opportunities that are identified in the UK Climate Change Risk Assessments (CCRAs). Evaluations have revealed a concerning lack of progress on adaptation to climate change risks in the UK. The poor performance of NAPs indicates that they are failing to support action on adaptation.

There is limited understanding of the barriers to the implementation of adaptation policy identified, despite them repeatedly occurring in sequential NAP processes. To motivate action, there is an urgent need to find practical ways to overcome these barriers.



Key barriers to the English NAPs

We identified the key barriers to the NAP in England based on a novel approach to deepen our understanding of the barriers, their origin, influence and relationships (see right for definitions).

Eighteen interviews and a workshop were held with key stakeholders in the development and implementation of English national adaptation policy (including government departments, agencies, and sector experts). Ten key barriers to the English NAP, as well as their origins and influence, were identified.

We mapped the relationships between factors in Figure 1. Key barriers to the English NAP are presented in blue boxes in the middle of the map, with related barriers in grey. On the left side of the map, the factors that give rise to the key barriers are given ('origins'). The factors that are affected by the key barriers are shown on the right side of the map ('influences'), each referring to a specific climate adaptation policy problem. The relationships between origins, barriers, and influences are shown by the red arrows. The map makes it easy to see the causal mechanisms between factors.

Soft and hard barriers to NAPs

Key barriers are described as soft or hard based on the characteristics of each barrier itself and related sources (related barriers and origins).

Soft barriers: can be overcome with fairly simple, direct solutions, additional resources or efforts. The five key soft barriers identified were:

- The frequent turnover of staff in the civil service
- No specific allocation of funding to adaptation
- Uncertainty of effectiveness of adaptation policy results
- Lack of clarity of who should be engaged in NAP
- Lack of understanding of adaptation

Hard barriers: cannot be overcome with simple and direct solutions, additional resources or efforts due to their complexity, lack of time, or financial and political limitations. The five key hard barriers identified were:

- Poor communication between government departments
- Lack of political will
- The ongoing low priority of adaptation (non-compulsory actions for adaptation)
- Mismatch in the timescale needed for adaptation action and government election periods
- Insufficient understanding of the economic aspect of adaptation and related research

Key terms related to barriers to adaptation

It is important to explain why a barrier occurs (origin), how the barriers affect the adaptation process (influence), and how barriers interact with each other (relationship).

Some definitions:

- **Climate change adaptation:** the process of adjustment to actual or expected climate and its effects, in order to moderate harm or exploit beneficial opportunities
- **Barrier to adaptation:** the factors that stop, delay or divert the development and implementation of adaptation actions, which can be overcome with additional effort, creative management, change in thinking, prioritisation, and related shift in resources, land uses, institutions, etc.
- **Origin:** the factors that give rise to adaptation barriers
- **Influence:** the consequences of the barriers to adaptation e.g. the problems in implementing national adaptation policy
- **Relationship:** causal chains and links between factors, including the relationships between barriers, origins, and influences

Procedures for devising practical solutions for barriers

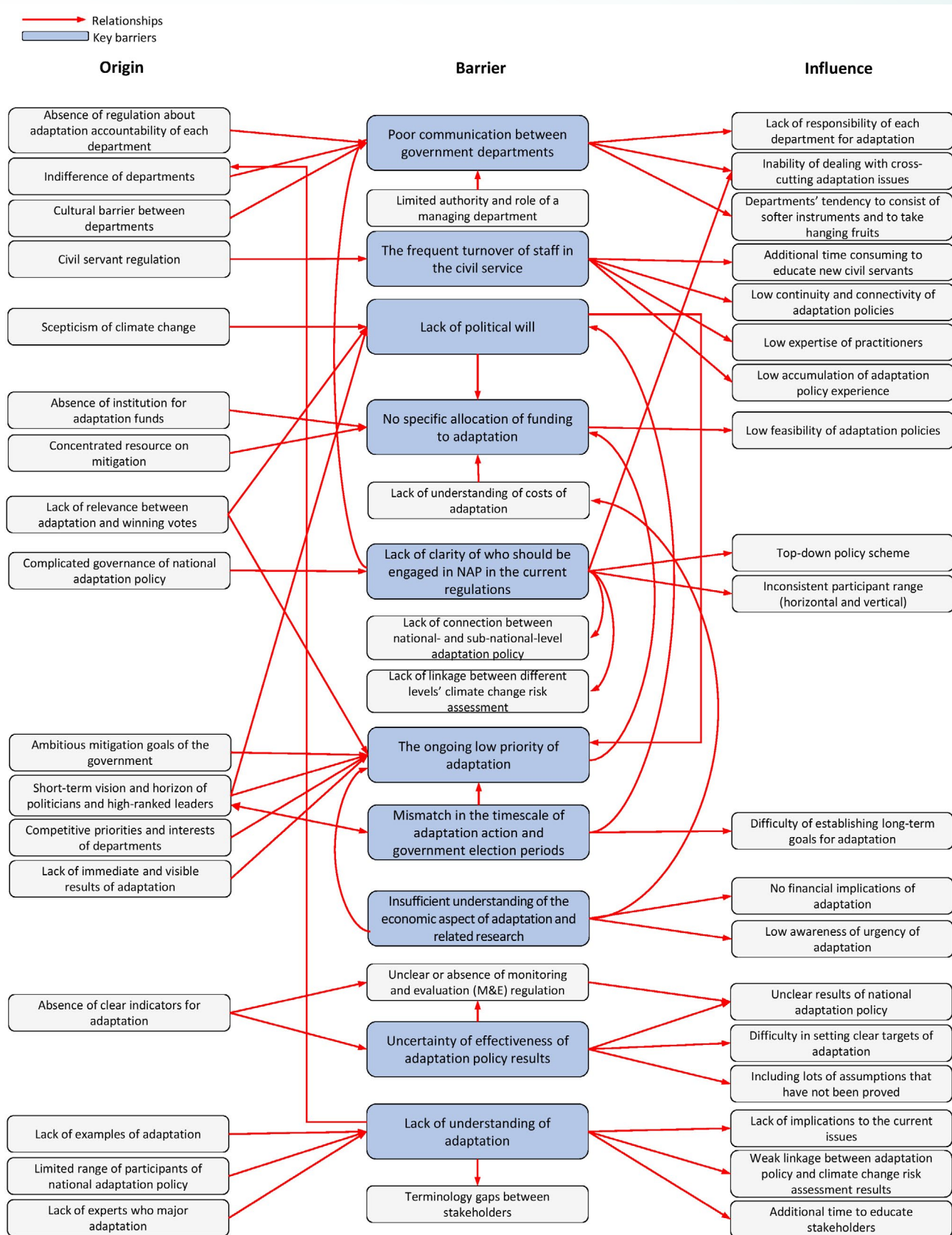
Based on the map (see Figure 1), this policy brief suggests a series of steps to help policy practitioners understand the barriers to the NAP and related policy problems and to devise practical solutions for overcoming the barriers.

1. Check current problems that stakeholders face in the NAP process among the identified influence factors in the barrier map
2. Identify the barriers and origins that are related to the problem by tracing relationships backwards and analysing what needs to be addressed first to solve the problem
3. Develop effective and manageable solutions to reduce or overcome the problem, including related barriers.

If a solution database is prepared in advance - including suggestions and opinions from stakeholders and experts, and good examples of solutions - it will provide practical insights by allowing potential solutions in the database to be connected to related barriers or origins.

Figure 1. Barrier map of English NAPs

Barriers to adaptation, their origin, and influences are presented, with relationships between them indicated by the red arrows.





Examples of practical and specific solutions

Based on the suggested procedures and solution database from interviews and workshops, here are two examples of developing practical solutions, for a soft and a hard barrier to adaptation respectively.

Example 1: Lack of clarity of who should be engaged in NAP

1. The English NAP rarely addresses cross-cutting adaptation issues. There has also been disagreement about who should be involved in the NAP and a lack of consistency in who has participated in different NAP processes. Policymakers and practitioners who want to resolve these problems can find related influence factors in the barrier map (see Figure 2a).

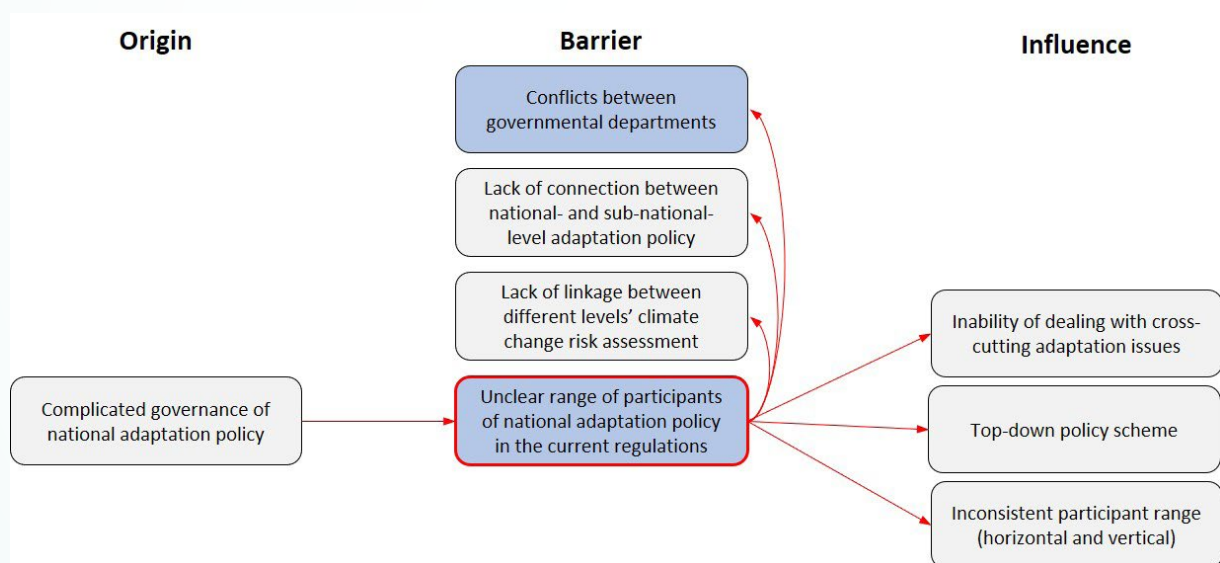
2. From this it is possible to see that ‘unclear range of participants in NAP in the current regulations’ is related to the problems mentioned above, and ‘complicated governance of NAP’ should be addressed first to address this situation.

3. Based on a solution database, policymakers and stakeholders can develop practical solutions that can address the ‘complicated governance of NAP’, including:

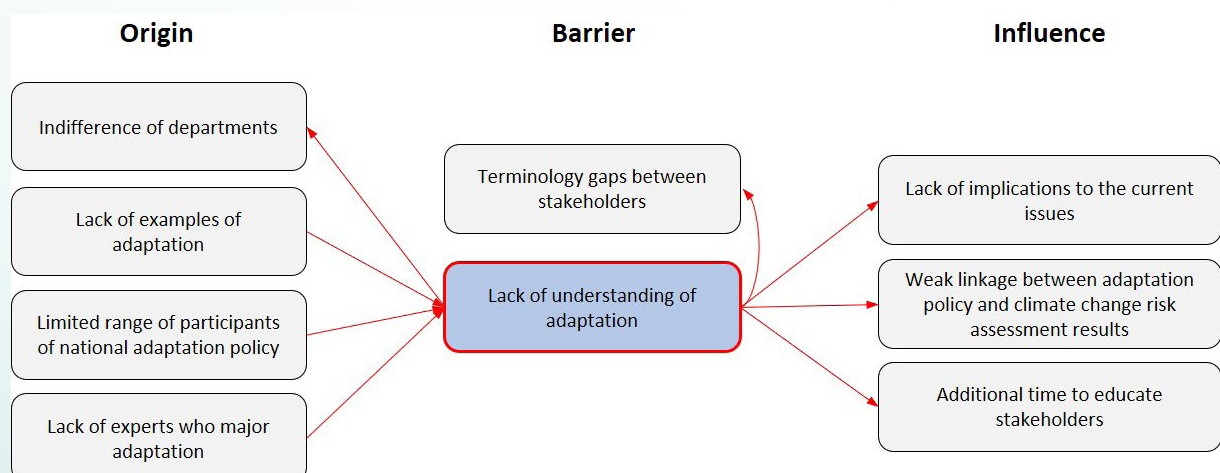
- Conduct a formal stakeholder mapping to reduce the complexity of governance of NAPs
- Hold official meetings with identified stakeholders and explain why they need to be involved in NAPs
- Legally specify horizontal and vertical participants of NAPs and communicate this well

Figure 2. Excerpts from the barrier map illustrating examples of how to develop practical solutions using the map
Two examples of barriers that stakeholders face in implementing the NAP process are presented below, with the origin, and influence factors and the relationships between them.

2a. Lack of clarity of who should be engaged in NAP.



2b. Lack of understanding of adaptation.





Example 2: Lack of understanding of adaptation

1. It has been pointed out that the English NAP does not sufficiently detail the implications of climate change impacts for other government departments and their priority issues. Further, the approach to how the identified risks in CCRAs are addressed in the adaptation actions in NAP is unclear. Policymakers and practitioners can diagnose related influence factors in the barrier map (Figure 2b above).
2. 'Lack of understanding of adaptation' is a key barrier here. This can be overcome by first considering the 'origin' factors e.g.: lack of practical examples of relevant adaptation options; the limited range of people involved in implementing NAP actions; and the lack of experts on putting adaptation into practice.
3. Based on a solution database, policymakers and practitioners can develop practical solutions that can address the factors that lead to the development of these barriers, including:
 - Understand adaptation from the perspective of the people who are integrating climate change risks and adaptation issues into their day to day decisions
 - Consider adaptation as an issue that affects all policy areas, not just environmental policy
 - Use training on ways to manage climate risks to encourage participation from a wider range of groups, e.g. local communities or private companies
 - Communicate more about what needs to be done and managed for adaptation rather than simply emphasising the importance of adaptation

Recommendations

Policymakers and practitioners of national adaptation policy repeatedly experience barriers to adaptation. To address this, we recommend that adaptation policymakers and practitioners in England and in the devolved regions should:

- Consider the causes and implications of the barriers in adaptation processes, rather than seeing them only in isolation
- Map the barriers, and update this map as new evidence emerges and implementation experience matures, focusing on understanding the factors which created the barriers ('origins') and the implications of each barrier ('influences') as well as the relationships between them
- Devise solutions based on the deeper understanding developed through the mapping process
- Address the soft barriers, that can be more easily overcome, first
- Monitor and manage the barriers to adaptation to ensure the solutions are effective, repeating the process as necessary

About the authors

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Further information

This policy brief is developed based on an excerpt from Seunghan Lee's doctoral research.