

POLICY BRIEF

Integrating mountain priorities into the UNFCCC's core processes

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Our team at Oxford Policy Management is supporting the Government of Nepal's efforts to drive the mountain agenda in climate negotiations through the UK Government-funded Climate Ambition Support Alliance (CASA). This policy brief draws on our experiences to recommend how mountain priorities can be meaningfully incorporated into international climate policy frameworks.

The profound impact of climate change on mountain ecosystems and the communities they sustain is unequivocally recognised. Significant strides have been made in weaving the mountain agenda into climate negotiations: the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) now features a dedicated cryosphere chapter, and mountain-related issues are increasingly integrated into various UNFCCC mechanisms, such as the Nairobi Work Programme, the Global Goal on Adaptation, and the Global Stocktake. The expert dialogue on mountain and climate change at the Bonn Climate Change Conference (SB60) further underscored their critical importance, calling for enhanced regional cooperation, increased knowledge-sharing, and greater involvement of local communities.



Breaking the impasse

However, proper strategic integration into the formal UNFCCC negotiation tracks remains a critical, often overlooked, frontier. The persistent inertia in fully embedding the mountain agenda into multilateral processes often stems from the lack of a dedicated negotiating stream for mountains; limited political will beyond a core group of mountainous and like-minded nations; and a fragmented advocacy landscape. Compounding this, the unique socio-economic challenges faced by mountain communities—including poverty, limited market access, and insufficient infrastructure—often go unaddressed in broader climate strategies, exacerbating their vulnerability and hindering effective adaptation.

“Crucially, the success of global climate action hinges on a deliberate and strategic integration of mountain priorities into core UNFCCC processes, particularly the Global Goal on Adaptation, the Global Stocktake, and the principles of a Just Transition. This brief now lays out some recommendations for urgent action.

The path forward

1. Strengthening the Global Goal on Adaptation for mountain resilience

The Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA), a cornerstone of the Paris Agreement’s adaptation framework, aims to enhance adaptive capacity, strengthen resilience, and reduce vulnerability to climate change (Article 7.1). Mountains are frontline regions for adaptation, disproportionately affected by glacial melt, permafrost thaw, and extreme weather. For the GGA to truly capture global adaptation needs and align with Article 7.1 of the Paris Agreement, Parties must ensure explicit recognition and tailored indicators for mountain adaptation within its framework. Without this, the GGA risks becoming an aspirational target that overlooks the specific and dire needs of these fragile regions and their populations, leaving them acutely exposed. Current GGA discussions must explicitly consider mountain-specific adaptation needs, such as:

- **Robust Early Warning Systems (EWS):** Developing and implementing comprehensive, multi-hazard EWS for Glacier Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs), landslides, and extreme weather events. As highlighted by the **UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction** and the **World Meteorological Organization**, effective EWS are critical for minimising loss of life and property in disaster-prone regions - and mountains present unique topographical challenges requiring tailored solutions.
- **Climate-Smart Agriculture (CSA) and diversified livelihoods:** Promoting resilient, climate-adapted farming practices and diversified livelihoods that can withstand changing conditions, moving away from monocultures towards sustainable, locally appropriate systems. The UN Food and Agriculture Organization emphasises CSA as vital for food security and adaptation in vulnerable regions, directly applicable to mountain agricultural systems struggling with altered precipitation and temperature regimes.
- **Nature-Based Solutions (NBS):** Investing in ecosystem restoration, sustainable land management, and protecting critical watersheds to enhance natural buffers against climate impacts. Reflecting principles from the Convention on Biological Diversity and the UN Convention to Combat Desertification, NBS offer cost-effective and sustainable adaptation benefits, particularly in maintaining hydrological services and preventing erosion in mountain catchments.
- **Transboundary water management:** Implementing cooperative strategies that account for changing glacial melt and precipitation patterns across national borders. Given the transboundary nature of mountain ecosystems, particularly water resources, as highlighted by organisations like the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development in High Mountain Asia, regional cooperation is essential to prevent conflict and ensure equitable water access.

2. Ensuring the Global Stocktake provides a true picture of mountain progress

The Global Stocktake (GST), mandated by Article 14 of the Paris Agreement, is the mechanism for periodically assessing the collective progress towards achieving the Agreement’s purpose and long-term goals. It offers a vital opportunity to assess whether current climate action is adequately addressing mountain challenges. A GST that lacks granular data and specific assessments for mountains will fail to accurately reflect global progress, masking



significant vulnerabilities and hindering the identification of necessary interventions. It will present an incomplete picture of global climate resilience. For the GST to be effective for mountains, it requires:

- **Disaggregated data & monitoring:** Robust, localised data and indicators on climate impacts, adaptation gaps, and financial flows specific to mountain regions. This includes cryosphere monitoring and socio-economic vulnerability assessments. As repeatedly emphasised by the IPCC's Assessment Reports (AR6 WGII), particularly regarding vulnerable ecosystems and the cryosphere, and by the UN Mountain Partnership, disaggregated data is crucial for targeted policy interventions and for accurately tracking progress and needs across distinct geographical and socio-economic contexts.
- **Mountain-specific reporting:** Encouraging Parties with mountain territories to include detailed information on mountain ecosystems and communities in their National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) and Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). Enhancing the specificity of NAPs and NDCs for mountain regions, as encouraged by the Nairobi Work Programme (NWP), is vital for transparent reporting and for ensuring national planning addresses these unique vulnerabilities.
- **Participatory review:** Ensuring the voices of mountain communities and indigenous peoples are heard and considered in the GST's technical assessment and political outcomes. The UNFCCC has increasingly recognised the importance of indigenous knowledge and local community engagement, principles enshrined in the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform (LCIPP), ensuring that solutions are culturally appropriate and effective.

3. Advocating for a 'Just Transition' process for mountain communities

The UNFCCC's commitment to a "just transition" must extend explicitly to mountain communities. The transition to a low-carbon economy must be equitable and inclusive, particularly for vulnerable mountain communities that often rely on traditional livelihoods susceptible to climate change and broader economic shifts. Without a "just" approach, the climate transition risks exacerbating existing inequalities, displacing communities, undermining unique cultural heritage, and fueling resentment rather than cooperation.

A Just Transition for the mountains entails:

- **Diversified green economies:** Supporting the development of sustainable economic alternatives like eco-tourism, sustainable forestry, and renewable energy production (e.g. micro-hydro), and ensuring benefits accrue locally and create resilient livelihoods. This aligns with the ILO's principles for a just transition and the broader UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and SDG 13 (Climate Action), fostering green jobs and sustainable economic development.
- **Capacity building and technology transfer:** Providing resources and training to mountain communities to adopt new technologies and skills for climate resilience and green jobs, moving beyond traditional economic models. Leveraging existing mechanisms such as the NWP for knowledge sharing and technology transfer, and emphasising intra-regional cooperation, can help bridge technology gaps in vulnerable regions.
- **Protection of traditional livelihoods:** Safeguarding and enhancing traditional knowledge and sustainable practices, ensuring they are integrated into adaptation and development strategies as a cornerstone of resilience. The Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform within the UNFCCC underscores the value of traditional knowledge for climate action, recognising its often-overlooked benefits for adaptation and ecosystem management.
- **Equitable access to resources:** Ensuring mountain communities have fair access to finance, technology, and decision-making processes, preventing them from being left behind in the global climate response. This calls for targeted financial flows, including through the Green Climate Fund and the Adaptation Fund, and equitable representation in decision-making bodies, aligning with the UNFCCC's principle of common but differentiated responsibilities.

An interdependent future

Protecting our mountains is not merely an environmental endeavour; it is a global imperative for human well-being, ecological stability, and sustainable development. As the "water towers" of the world, their health directly impacts billions. The time for passive observation and fragmented efforts is over. By uniting our voices, leveraging science and local knowledge, and strategically aligning mountain priorities with core UNFCCC processes, we can ensure that our mountains continue to sustain life for generations to come, strengthening the global response to climate change and embodying the true spirit of the Paris Agreement.



Our mission is to improve lives through sustainable policy change.



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