

OPTIONS FOR A POLITICALLY-SALIENT HEADLINE FOR THE GLOBAL GOAL ON ADAPTATION



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INTRODUCTION

The outcome of the Paris Agreement established the Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA), not as a quantitative goal but as a shared aspiration. The GGA will be one of the goals against which the global stocktake (GST) will assess collective progress.

Since the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) 21st Conference of the Parties (COP21), there was little concrete progress on the GGA until COP26 when Parties launched the Glasgow–Sharm el-Sheikh work programme (GlaSS) to further define the GGA. The GlaSS programme has resulted in eight workshops on the GGA, an Adaptation Committee report, input from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Working Group II and other relevant constituted bodies, and over 100 Party and observer submissions. Beyond the technical discussions, the development and agreement of a framework for the GGA at COP28 offers the opportunity to re-elevate adaptation on the global political stage.

In its latest assessment report, the IPCC described adaptation action as “fragmented, small in scale, incremental, and [...] focused more on planning rather than implementation.”¹ Adaptation finance is a key barrier, with available finance estimated to be less than 10 percent of what is required.² To address this, some Parties and stakeholders have explored the potential of adopting a GGA framework that includes a high-level, overarching headline goal or target that could concretize the

GGA and serve as a guiding star for collective efforts at a larger scale, similar to the 1.5 degree-Celsius limit or net-zero objective for mitigation, or the “30 x 30” goal for conservation.³ The incoming COP28 Presidency has stated that “the GST outcome must position a clear high-level political signal for adaptation.”⁴

Adaptation action on the ground has largely suffered due to a lack of political will and unifying vision. However, the most prevalent criticism against a single headline GGA is that it may have limited practical relevance to highly context-specific and locally varied conditions, and that it may be hard to measure progress against the goal. While there may be some truth to this, the same could have been said of the headline collective mitigation goals when they were first conceived in the context of the UNFCCC, as well as of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

While it may be difficult to agree to a single overarching adaptation goal and we currently may not have the methodologies to measure progress against it, efforts to establish a goal should still be undertaken. In the same way that a mitigation goal drove the development of needed methodologies, the same could be achieved with an adaptation goal. Similarly, a clear, internationally agreed headline adaptation goal could give line ministries greater leverage to advance the cause of adaptation and resilience domestically.⁵

Several different formulations for an overarching goal have been proposed formally and informally through the GlaSS programme and related discussions. In this brief, some of these proposals will be explored while highlighting their benefits, drawbacks, and considerations. The brief concludes by looking at how Parties can work toward the successful adoption of a GGA framework from now through COP28.

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION:

- What would constitute a robust, viable, and politically salient overarching adaptation goal?
- Do any of the proposed headline goals resonate? How can they be elevated to provide greater political signals?
- What would be a desirable outcome from COP28 to provide an ongoing high-level mandate to drive progress on adaptation?

EXPLORING PROPOSALS FOR A GLOBAL GOAL ON ADAPTATION

Several proposed formulations for a GGA are articulated below for consideration. In some cases, the exact wording has been replicated and in others, the proposal has been modified to make it more succinct, salient, or globally relevant.

POPULATION RESILIENCE-BASED GOAL

Focusing on those that are the most vulnerable to climate impacts, ensure that 50 percent of the global population is climate resilient by 2030, aspiring for 100 percent by 2050.

Many countries have proposed that the fundamental aim of the GGA should be to increase the resilience of the global population to climate change. This aim has been expressed in different ways, including an absolute, universal target. The IPCC estimates that 3.3 to 3.6 billion people live in contexts that are highly vulnerable to climate change, providing a potential numerical target for a population-focused goal.⁶

Other formulations for a population resilience-based goal include proportional increases in adaptive capacity or resilience over time (e.g., to enhance the adaptive capacity and resilience of the global population, including the reduction of climate impacts by at least 50 percent by 2030, and by at least 90 percent by 2050 compared to the business-as-usual scenario and expected impacts identified by scientific reports). However, proportional

increases in adaptive capacity or resilience may be challenging to measure. Partial targets can be perceived as inequitable because they do not cover 100 percent of the population.⁷

A population resilience-based goal would require addressing the technical challenges associated with robustly measuring adaptive capacity, resilience, or vulnerability reduction percentages, which some believe is methodologically impossible or would require significant time and resources. Notably, other initiatives do use such metrics. For instance, the goal of the High-Level Climate Champions' Race to Resilience initiative for non-Party stakeholders is to "help make four billion people more resilient to climate change impacts by 2030." Similarly, the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for Adaptation and Resilience program has an international adaptation initiative that seeks to "help more than half a billion people in developing countries adapt to and manage the impacts of climate change by 2030, to track with the timeline for meeting the SDGs."⁸

An additional challenge of a population-related goal is that it may bias action toward more populous states, potentially at the expense of highly vulnerable but low-population Small Island Developing States (SIDs). For that reason, some countries have called for proportionate indicators (e.g., reduced exposure to climate-related risks by reducing the number of individuals affected as a share of the country's total population by 2030).⁹

RESILIENT OUTCOMES-BASED GOAL

Well-being needs are met and improved upon, particularly in the key areas of water, food, health, infrastructure, and ecosystems, in spite of increasing climate and weather impacts.

Several countries and technical experts have expressed support for a goal related to achieving sustainable development priorities—water, health, food security, infrastructure, biodiversity, and livelihoods, among others—in spite of increasing climate and weather impacts. This framing is focused on enabling people, the planet, and economies to thrive in the context of a changing climate. While many view such an approach as holistic, it only vaguely indicates the transformations needed and could be challenging to measure in terms of progress. However, depending on the exact framing of the goal, measurement could, for example, be achieved through SDG reporting.

One proposed alternative formulation is: “Enhance well-being and prosperity by increasing access to water, food and health for the most vulnerable groups by 2030.”¹⁰

SOLUTIONS-ORIENTED GOAL

Every person on Earth to be protected by Early Warning Systems within five years.

Multiple observers, including the International Federation of the Red Cross, have proposed a target based on the UN Secretary-General’s call to provide access to early warning systems to everyone on Earth within five years. This goal has the appeal of being global in coverage, tangible, measurable, and aligned with the only global-scale adaptation initiative to date.

The drawback is that it is not comprehensive of all the kinds of solutions needed for effective adaptation to near- and long-term climate impacts, so some Parties may view it as incomplete as a headline goal on its own. Other solutions-oriented goals include expansion of disaster resilient infrastructure; social protection; universal access to potable water and reduced climate-induced water scarcity for domestic, industrial, and ecological purposes through enhancing drought management; flood protection; and climate-resilient infrastructure development.¹¹

PLANNING-ORIENTED GOAL

By 2030, all countries have developed national policy instruments to address adaptation to climate change and have integrated them into their development strategies.

Technical experts have proposed and supported planning-oriented goals through the GlaSS programme. A planning-oriented approach has the benefit of being measurable, achievable, process-oriented, and reflective of where most countries are in the adaptation cycle. However, some argue that this is not sufficiently focused on the implementation action that is needed to constitute a stand-alone headline goal. Others argue that this would shift the focus to national-level systems and processes rather than elevating adaptation to a shared global goal and responsibility.

LOSS-AVOIDANCE GOAL

Substantially reduce mortality, number of people affected, and economic loss and damage due to climate and weather-related events.

Several goals around avoided loss and damage have been proposed, and are indeed already agreed upon, including those under the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. But a loss-avoidance goal does not capture adaptation and resilience benefits beyond avoiding loss and damage. Many have indicated that for this to be an acceptable goal, it would have to be framed in an absolute sense, as for some accepting any mortality or loss and damage from climate-related events is untenable.

FINANCE-BASED GOAL

By 2030 all countries have the funding required to implement priority adaptation needs.

There are several challenges to finance-related targets and goals in the GGA, including preempting negotiations around the setting of the new collective quantified goal on climate finance, due to be adopted at COP29. Challenges notwithstanding, it is likely that many Parties would rally around an overarching goal that includes a focus on the adequacy of finance relative to adaptation needs of developing countries, as expressed through their nationally determined contributions, national adaptation plans (NAPs), and other adaptation policy instruments. Others would challenge that such a goal is not measuring effectiveness or impact of adaptation actions,

only the availability of financial resources. In addition, a goal focused on finance alone may ignore critical enablers of adaptation action that include institutional and governance dimensions.

Many argue that there must be a finance narrative embedded in the GGA, even if not as a headline goal, because without means of implementation, the GGA would seem very hollow. It has also been highlighted that this finance narrative should enable finance flows from multiple sources, including domestic resources, private sector investment, and development assistance.

One proposed formulation is, “By 2030, all countries have accessed funds from the GEF, GCF, Adaptation Fund, etc. for NAP implementation and address the needs and priorities reported in AdCom, BTR, and other climate planning instruments at the national level.”¹²

Another proposed alternative formulation is, “By 2030, international climate financing for adaptation achieves a balance with respect to mitigation, and has increased, in line with the commitments made and the new quantified collective goal for climate financing.”¹³

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Other considerations that have been raised include:

- the need to ensure that the eventual framework provides flexibility for national and local contexts to drive action and includes both bottom-up and top-down indicators and measures, while avoiding additional reporting burdens
- a strong emphasis on equity and justice considerations, including a focus on incorporating indigenous and traditional knowledge
- recognition of the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, in light of different national circumstances
- the need to address the risks of maladaptation and guiding practice toward avoiding maladaptation
- the need to address the management of transboundary climate risks
- the need to address potential increased risks to others through certain adaptation pathways
- the notion of transformational adaptation (although

COMPOSITE GOALS

It is important to note that none of the above formulations are mutually exclusive. A composite goal or mosaic of goals, emphasizing different aspects of resilience, might be needed to fully animate the GGA as articulated in the Paris Agreement and could safeguard against unintended consequences of a single goal. A composite goal could have focused, near-term objectives, as well as longer-term, more aspirational, and transformational ones.

An example of a composite goal could comprise:

- **an overarching population target** (e.g., “by 2050, improve the resilience of all people to the impacts of climate change”)
- **a near-term target focused on alarms** (e.g., “by 2027, every person on Earth is protected by Early Warning Systems”)
- **a planning target** (e.g., “by 2030, all countries have developed national policy instruments to address adaptation to climate change”)
- **a finance target** (e.g., “by 2030, international climate financing for adaptation achieves a balance with respect to mitigation, and has increased, in line with the commitments made and the new quantified collective goal”).

there are divergent views on the exact definition of the concept and the extent to which transformational adaptation may be desirable, with some noting that incremental adaptation is equally important and, in some cases, less disruptive)

- incentives for needed improvements in observation systems, not only to detect climate impacts and better inform adaptation planning and implementation, but also to support monitoring and evaluation of adaptation effectiveness at various scales
- examination of mitigation-adaptation co-benefits and linkage to the Paris Agreement’s temperature goal, potentially through targets ensuring that adaptive capacity—at a minimum—matches a level appropriate to a 1.5 degree Celsius temperature increase
- iteration—whether a GGA framework could be reviewed and revised on a regular basis as conditions change.

CONCLUSION

COP28 presents an opportunity to elevate adaptation, given that momentum on adaptation has stagnated in recent years relative to action on mitigation and in light of increasing attention on loss and damage. Adaptation would benefit from a clear and strong rallying signal or guiding star for higher ambition and implementation in the same way that mitigation has adopted such signals. However, this signal will likely not be delivered through a technical process but rather must be elevated to the political level. While technical experts can play a role in telling us whether or not such a signal is functionally effective, a signal itself would need to come from high-level political decision-makers.

C2ES Resources

A Solutions-oriented Approach to the Global Stocktake (Technical Paper)

<https://www.c2es.org/document/a-solutions-oriented-approach-to-the-global-stocktake-technical-paper/>

Considerations for Operationalizing the Loss and Damage Fund and Funding Arrangements (Technical Paper)

<https://www.c2es.org/document/considerations-for-operationalizing-the-loss-and-damage-fund-and-funding-arrangements-technical-paper/>

Understanding Finance for Loss & Damage Under the UNFCCC (Technical Paper)

<https://www.c2es.org/document/understanding-finance-for-loss-damage-under-the-unfccc/>

Leadership by the G20 is crucial for strong outcomes at COP28

<https://www.c2es.org/2023/09/leadership-by-the-g20-is-crucial-for-strong-outcomes-at-cop28/>

ANNEX 1: MANDATE FOR THE GLOBAL GOAL ON ADAPTATION

Article 7 of the Paris Agreement established, for the first time, a Global Goal on Adaptation with the aim of “enhancing adaptive capacity, strengthening resilience and reducing vulnerability to climate change, with a view to contributing to sustainable development and ensuring an adequate adaptation response in the context of the temperature goal of holding the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and pursuing efforts to limit it below 1.5°C.”¹⁴

The African Group of Negotiators (AGN) originally presented the GGA in the run up to the Paris negotiations as a quantitative goal. The submission states that developed countries should bear the burden of developing countries’ adaptation costs, and that the “adaptation costs associated with the long-term (temperature) goal shall constitute the global adaptation goal.”¹⁵ Parties did not come to a consensus at the time for a variety of technical, political, constitutional, and legal reasons. The outcome of the Paris Agreement establishes the GGA not as a quantitative goal but as a shared aspirational goal with political, rather than legal, effect, and one of the long-term goals against which the GST will assess collective progress. Article 7.14 of the Paris Agreement sets out that the GST shall:

- recognize the adaptation efforts of developing country Parties
- enhance the implementation of adaptation action
- review the adequacy and effectiveness of adaptation and support provided for adaptation
- review the overall progress made in achieving the GGA.¹⁶

Under Decision 3/CMA.4 on the GGA, Parties decided to “initiate the development of a framework for

the global goal on adaptation to be undertaken through a structured approach under the Glasgow–Sharm el-Sheikh work programme in 2023, [...] with a view to the framework being adopted at COP28.” The decision further articulates that the framework “may take into consideration, inter alia:

- (a) Dimensions (iterative adaptation cycle): impact, vulnerability and risk assessment; planning; implementation; and monitoring, evaluation and learning; recognizing that support in terms of finance, capacity-building and technology transfer is a consideration in each stage of the cycle;
- (b) Themes: water; food and agriculture; cities, settlements and key infrastructure; health; poverty and livelihoods; terrestrial and freshwater ecosystems; and oceans and coastal ecosystems; tangible cultural heritage; mountain regions; and biodiversity;
- (c) Cross-cutting considerations: country-driven, gender-responsive, participatory and fully transparent approaches, human rights approaches, intergenerational equity and social justice, taking into consideration vulnerable groups, communities and ecosystems, and nature-based solutions, and based on and guided by the best available science including science-based indicators, metrics and targets, as appropriate, traditional knowledge, knowledge of indigenous peoples and local knowledge systems, ecosystem-based adaptation, nature-based solutions, community-based adaptation, disaster risk reduction and intersectional approaches with a view to integrating adaptation into relevant socioeconomic and environmental policies and actions, where appropriate.”

ANNEX 2: THE GLAGOW-SHARM EL-SHEIK WORK PROGRAMME

Parties largely agree that the GGA framework should focus on the adaptation cycle articulated in the COP27 decision (impact, vulnerability, and risk assessment; planning; implementation; and monitoring, evaluation, and learning), though some Parties have expressed concern that the cycle is tied too closely to national processes and not sufficiently “global” for such a goal. Other Parties argue that this approach makes the management of transboundary climate risks difficult.

There is also agreement that the context-specific nature of adaptation requires that the framework include bottom-up indicators reflecting local contexts, in addition to top-down global indicators. Moreover, there is agreement that the framework should employ a combination of measures as suggested by the Adaptation Committee, including both quantitative and qualitative indicators, as well as a variety of voices, data, and methods. The need for aggregability should be balanced with measures that bring contextual richness.¹⁷ Discussions have further recognized that process indicators—as well as impact- or solutions-oriented indicators—can capture the quality of processes involved in identifying, developing, and implementing adaptation actions. It is widely held that the GGA should adopt backward- and forward-looking perspectives to review overall progress but also to send strong signals to drive future adaptation action.

Party submissions highlight that country reporting should not be too burdensome, which can be achieved by aligning the GGA framework with existing communication and reporting instruments, including those of

other agreed international frameworks, such as the 2030 Agenda, the Sendai Framework, and the Convention on Biodiversity.

Despite these general areas of convergence, the discussions at the fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth GlaSS workshops and the outcome of negotiations at the 58th Subsidiary Bodies meetings demonstrate that there are still several fundamental unresolved issues relating to the GGA framework.

- There are diverging options on whether the framework should set concrete targets to guide action and measure progress, or whether high-level political signals or goal statements are sufficient.
- It has also been proposed that indicators could be used to measure progress, without needing to set specific targets.
- The role of means of implementation (specifically finance, technology transfer, and capacity building) versus enablers of adaptation action (e.g., political commitment and follow through, institutional frameworks, policies, and instruments) remains contentious, with some countries arguing that means of implementation must be part of the framework to make it implementable and not a false promise.
- Finally, there is divergence on the need for further work following COP28. Some countries contend that the framework should be immediately implementable at the time of its adoption at COP28, while others argue there may be need for further work to develop indicators and measurement methodologies.

ENDNOTES

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