
Options for a Politically-Salient Headline for the Global Goal on Adaptation

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Introduction

1. 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.
2. Between COP21 and COP26 there was little concrete progress on the GGA, until Parties decided to establish and launch the Glasgow–Sharm el-Sheikh work programme (GlaSS) to further define the GGA. Through the GlaSS there have been six workshops to date on the GGA, a report from the Adaptation Committee, input from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Working Group II, and other relevant constituted bodies, as well as 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.
3. The IPCC in its latest report 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 countries and stakeholders have explored the potential of adopting a GGA framework that includes a high-level, overarching headline goal that could

¹ IPCC, 2022: Summary for Policymakers [H.-O. Pörtner, D.C. Roberts, E.S. Poloczanska, K. Mintenbeck, M. Tignor, A. Alegría, M. Craig, S. Langsdorf, S. Lösckke, V. Möller, A. Okem (eds.)]. In: *Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* [H.-O. Pörtner, D.C. Roberts, M. Tignor, E.S. Poloczanska, K. Mintenbeck, A. Alegría, M. Craig, S. Langsdorf, S. Lösckke, V. Möller, A. Okem, B. Rama (eds.)]. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK and New York, NY, USA, pp. 3-33, doi:10.1017/9781009325844.001

² UNEP *Adaptation Gap Report 2022*, 1 November 2022: <https://www.unep.org/resources/adaptation-gap-report-2022>

serve as a north star to guide 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 conservation³.

4. Adaptation action on the ground has suffered due to a lack of political will and unifying vision. However, the most prevalent criticism against a single headline global goal for adaptation 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 for headline collective mitigation goals when first conceived of in the context of the UNFCCC, as well as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
5. Because it may be difficult to agree on a single overarching adaptation goal, and because we currently may not have the methodologies to measure progress against it, does not mean we should not try. 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 greater leverage to line ministries to advance the cause of adaptation and resilience domestically.
6. Several different formulations for an overarching goal have been proposed formally and informally through the GlaSS programme and related discussions. Some are articulated below for consideration, in some cases taking the exact wording that has been proposed, and in others reformulating the proposal to make it more succinct, salient, or globally relevant.

Considerations:

- What would constitute a robust, viable, politically salient overarching adaptation goal?
- Do any of the proposed headline goals resonate? How could 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?

³ Kuming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework: <https://www.cbd.int/gbf/targets/>

A. Population Resilience-Based Goal:

50 percent of vulnerable populations made resilient by 2030, reaching 100 percent by 2050.

7. Many countries have proposed that the fundamental aim of the the GGA should be to increase the resilience of the global population to climate change. This has been expressed in different ways, including an absolute, universal target (e.g., by 2050, improve the resilience of all people to the impacts of climate change/protect all people from the impacts of climate change), to progressive increases in population being made more resilient, starting with the most vulnerable. This latter formulation could be viewed as inequitable by not reaching 100 percent of the vulnerable population until 2050.
8. Other formulations include proportional increases in resilience over time (e.g., increase the resilience of all vulnerable people by 50 percent by 2030 and 100 percent by 2050), which is challenging to measure, but is seen as more just. The IPCC estimates that 3.3 to 3.6 billion people live in contexts that are highly vulnerable to climate change,⁴ providing a potential numerical target for a population-focused goal.
9. This goal would require addressing the technical challenges associated with measuring resilience or vulnerability reduction percentages. Notably, other initiatives use similar metrics. For instance, the goal of the Race to Resilience initiative of non-Party stakeholders is to “help make four billion people more resilient to climate change impacts by 2030.” Similarly, the U.S. PREPARE program, in its international adaptation initiative, 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 Sustainable Development Goals.”
10. 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.

⁴ IPCC, 2022: Summary for Policymakers [H.-O. Pörtner, D.C. Roberts, E.S. Poloczanska, K. Mintenbeck, M. Tignor, A. Alegría, M. Craig, S. Langsdorf, S. Löschke, V. Möller, A. Okem (eds.)]. In: Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [H.-O. Pörtner, D.C. Roberts, M. Tignor, E.S. Poloczanska, K. Mintenbeck, A. Alegría, M. Craig, S. Langsdorf, S. Löschke, V. Möller, A. Okem, B. Rama (eds.)]. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK and New York, NY, USA, pp. 3-33, doi:10.1017/9781009325844.001

B. 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.

11. Several countries and technical experts have expressed support for a goal related to achieving sustainable development priorities such as water, health, food security, biodiversity, and livelihoods, in spite of increasing climate and weather impacts.
12. Many view this framing—focused on enabling people, the planet, and economies to thrive in the context of a changing climate—as holistic and indicative of the transformations needed, even if it is vague. Some would also say that measuring progress could be challenging. However measurement could be achieved through SDG reporting, for example, depending on the exact framing of the goal. One recent proposed formulation is: *“Enhance well-being and prosperity by increasing access to water, food and health for the most vulnerable groups by 2030.”*⁵

C. Solutions-Oriented Goal:

Every person on Earth is protected by early warning systems within five years.

13. Multiple observers, including the International Federation of the Red Cross and others, have proposed the UN Secretary-General’s call to provide access to early warning systems to everyone on earth within five years as a target. This has the appeal of being global in coverage, tangible, measurable, and aligned with the only global-scale adaptation initiative to date.
14. 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 may be viewed as incomplete as a headline goal on its own. Other solutions-oriented goals have pointed to expansion of disaster resilient infrastructure.⁶

⁵ See Infomal Note on SBSTA 58 agenda item 5 SBI 58 agenda item 11 Glasgow–Sharm el-Sheikh work programme on the global goal on adaptation referred to in decision 7/CMA.3 Version 13/6/2023 12:15 [SBSTA 58 | UNFCCC](#)

⁶ See Infomal Note on SBSTA 58 agenda item 5 SBI 58 agenda item 11 Glasgow–Sharm el-Sheikh work programme on the global goal on adaptation referred to in decision 7/CMA.3 Version 13/6/2023 12:15 [SBSTA 58 | UNFCCC](#)

D. 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.

15. Planning-oriented goals have been proposed and supported by many technical experts involved in the GlASS process. This approach has the benefit of being measurable, achievable, process-oriented, and reflective of where most countries are in the adaptation cycle. But 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.

E. Loss Avoidance Goal:

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

16. Several goals around avoided loss and damage have been proposed, and are indeed already agreed, including as a part of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. This approach has the appeal of bringing alignment with the Sendai Framework and focusing on one of the ultimate impacts of adaptation action, albeit in a negative framing that doesn't capture the 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.

F. Finance-based Goal:

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

17. Examples of possible finance-based goals include⁷:

- *“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”*; and

⁷ [Source: Submission from the UN Foundation on behalf the Adaptation Research Alliance, Adaptation Without Borders, Alliance for Global Water Adaptation, Argentina 1.5, the Climate Policy Institute, the International Center for Integrated Mountain Development, the International Alliance to Combat Ocean Acidification, and the World Resources Institute, May 2023.](#)

- *“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.”*

18. There are several challenges with including finance-related targets and goals in the GGA, particularly preempting negotiations around the setting of the new climate finance goal. Challenges notwithstanding, it is likely that many countries would rally around a finance-related goal that focuses on the adequacy of finance relative to adaptation needs. 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 including institutional and governance dimensions.

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

G. Composite Goals

20. It is important to note that none of the above formulations are mutually exclusive, and 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. A composite goal could also safeguard against unintended consequences of a single goal, and have both focused, near-term objectives, as well as longer term, more aspirational and transformational objectives.

21. An example of a composite goal (proposed in a consultation) could comprise:

- an overarching **population goal** (e.g., *by 2050, improve the resilience of all people to the impacts of climate change*)
- a near term goal focused on **alarms** (e.g., *by 2027, every person on Earth is protected by early warning systems*)
- **planning** (e.g., *by 2030, all countries have developed national policy instruments to address adaptation to climate change*)
- **finance** (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 for climate financing*).

Other Considerations

22. Other considerations raised by some in discussions of the GGA, which are outlined below.

- The need to ensure that the eventual framework that emerges provides flexibility for national and local contexts to drive action, and includes bottom-up indicators and measures as well as top-down ones, but should avoid creating additional reporting burdens.
- The framework should include a strong emphasis on equity and justice considerations, including a focus on incorporating indigenous and traditional knowledge.
- The framework should also address the risks of maladaptation and guide practice toward avoiding maladaptation. Furthermore, there is also a need to address management of transboundary climate risks, and the potentiality of increasing risks for others through certain adaptation pathways.
- The framework should consider the notion of transformational adaptation—although 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.
- The GGA could provide an important impetus 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.
- The framework should also examine mitigation-adaptation co-benefits, and link to the the temperature goal, potentially through targets around ensuring that adaptive capacity matches a level appropriate to at least a 1.5 degree C temperature increase.
- The framework should be viewed as iterative, and reviewed and revised on a regular basis as conditions change.

Conclusion

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

Annex 1: Mandate for the Global Goal on Adaptation

1. Article 7 of the Paris Agreement established, for the first time, a GGA as “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.”
2. The African Group of Negotiators (AGN) originally presented the GGA in the run up to the Paris negotiations as a quantitative goal. Their submission included 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.” There was no consensus at the time on this among Parties 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 GST will assess collective progress. Article 7.14 of the Paris Agreement sets out that the GST shall:
 - recognize adaptation efforts of developing country Parties
 - enhance the implementation of adaptation action considering the adaptation communication
 - review the adequacy and effectiveness of adaptation and support provided for adaptation
 - review the overall progress made in achieving the GGA.
3. Between COP21 and COP26 there was little concrete progress on the GGA, until Parties decided to establish and launch a comprehensive work program, the GlaSS work programme, to further define the GGA. The work programme, which sets out eight workshops over a two-year period (2022–23), is jointly managed by the Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI) and Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA). Its intended outcome is a decision text on the GGA that fulfils the objectives set out in the Paris Agreement. Several hundred Parties and non-Party stakeholders attended the four GlaSS workshops in 2022, which produced detailed summaries of the discussions and presentations.
4. Through COP27’s 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: Progress to Date on the GGA

1. Through the GlASS work programme there have been five workshops to date on the GGA, a report from the Adaptation Committee, input from the IPCC Working Group II and other relevant constituted bodies, as well as over 100 Party and Observer submissions.
2. There is by and large agreement to focus the GGA framework on the adaptation cycle articulated in the COP27 decision (impact, vulnerability, and risk assessment; planning; implementation; and monitoring, evaluation, and learning), though some have expressed concern that this is too tied to national processes, and not sufficient for a global goal.
3. 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, but also a variety of voices, data, and methods. The need for aggregability should also be balanced with measures that bring contextual richness. Discussions have further recognized that there should be process indicators as well as impact or solutions-oriented targets to 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, both reviewing overall progress, but also sending strong signals to drive future adaptation action.

4. Submissions highlight that country reporting should not be too burdensome and that this can be achieved by aligning the GGA framework with existing communication and reporting instruments, including other agreed international frameworks such as the SDGs, the Sendai Framework, and the Convention on Biological Diversity.
5. Following the fifth GlaSS workshop, which focused on transformational adaptation, there is an increased interest in including more transformational (as opposed to incremental) elements in the framework, examples of which sorely are lacking, particularly in lower-income countries, though this has not yet materialized into concrete suggestions for the content of the framework.
6. Despite these general areas of convergence, the discussions at the sixth GlaSS workshop and outcome of negotiations at 58th Subsidiary Body meeting in Bonn (SB58) demonstrated that there are still several fundamental unresolved issues relating to the GGA framework. Some argue that the purpose of the GGA, and the constituencies/ stakeholders to which it applies still need clarification before the structure and content of the framework can be discussed. Others would state that the purpose is clear from the Paris Agreement and subsequent COP decisions, and are eager to move forward with discussions on the structure and content of the framework, including targets and indicators. There are few concrete proposals illustrating what the framework could look like in terms of structure and content, though the outcome from SB58 invites parties and observers to submit their views on the draft decision for consideration and adoption at COP28, and encourages continued discussion of matters related to the framework, the development and use of targets, indicators and metrics in the remaining two workshops this year.