Briefing

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Adaptation Research Alliance

Policy pointers

Policymakers should collaborate with civil society actors and recognise them as key stakeholders in the Global Goal on Adaptation negotiations to help bridge capacity gaps between Parties.

Civil society organisations (CSOs) can support developing country negotiators and strengthen their capabilities to engage meaningfully in the Global Goal on Adaptation process by providing technical support, facilitating learning between countries, and helping Parties harness synergies for data and reporting.

By encouraging a whole-of-society approach, CSOs can help ensure that all voices — including those of vulnerable and marginalised communities — are meaningfully represented in the process.

CSOs can highlight issues such as transboundary risks, scrutinise or comment on national efforts to demand accountability, and work with the media and others to encourage Parties to raise their ambition.

Seven priorities for an inclusive Global Goal on Adaptation

With the establishment of the Glasgow–Sharm El Sheik work programme (GlaSS) at the 26th United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conference of the Parties (COP26), discussions on how to operationalise the Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA) have shifted into high gear. To be effective, the GlaSS needs to hear and integrate diverse voices, and civil society organisations (CSOs) can help ensure decisions and steps taken represent the whole of society. But GGA negotiations and processes to date have focused on Parties-only activities and the role of CSOs remains unclear. Ahead of the next workshops under the GlaSS, this briefing presents seven priorities to help policymakers and civil society actors work together as valuable stakeholders in the process to agree the GGA at local, national and global levels.

Established in 2015 under the Paris Agreement, the Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA) aims to drive collective action on climate adaptation and bring parity between adaptation and mitigation efforts globally. Despite being accompanied by other mandates to advance adaptation work under the UNFCCC, there was little progress until COP26. This is partly due to the localised and contextualised nature of adaptation, which makes it difficult to establish common global goals. At COP26, six years after the Paris Agreement, Parties to the UNFCCC launched the Glasgow–Sharm El Sheik work programme (GlaSS), a two-year process to advance work on the GGA by providing a platform to agree and progress the key methodological and political features that Parties must agree on.

Inclusion under the GGA

The GlaSS states that the GGA must be country-led yet also include non-state actors, local communities and marginalised voices. At the same time, submissions and interventions from Parties to the UNFCCC and civil society alike have called for civil society organisations (CSOs) to play an integral role in the GGA process.

Despite the winding route taken to develop the GGA, publications and official and unofficial workshops have allowed Parties to gather and exchange views on it. Various reports have worked to untangle many methodological and technical issues, pointing to areas of common ground for Parties to build on.[1,2] These include the importance of being country-driven, using qualitative and quantitative methods, and including vulnerable and local voices,[3] as well as input from civil society and other experts.

The first compilation and synthesis of submissions on the GlaSS, published in June 2022,[4] further confirms that several Parties prioritise social inclusion, empowering the most

vulnerable and co-creation with other actors. But how civil society and local voices will be heard throughout this process is still to be determined.

Action across these priorities will ensure a more accountable, inclusive and therefore more effective GGA

Spanning capacity building, inclusion and accountability, the seven priorities outlined here aim to guide policymakers and CSOs to work together to ensure civil society actors are recognised as key stakeholders in the GGA process.

1. Strengthen developing country capabilities

To operationalise the GGA, Parties must grapple with several methodological and technical questions. These include establishing baselines, aggregating data across different scales and contexts, and integrating the uncertainties of climate risks in their planning, implementation, and monitoring, evaluation and learning,[5] to dynamically track progress towards the goal. The cross-sectoral nature of climate adaptation means that collating and analysing data across government departments and ministries is institutionally challenging.

Countries' capabilities and resources to address these technical issues vary. It will be difficult for some — especially Least Developed Countries or low- and middle-income countries — to hold the breadth of skills, knowledge and capabilities needed to address these challenges. CSOs can help plug this gap by providing technical support to Parties. For example, the Climate and Development Knowledge Network's (CDKN's) Negotiation Support Programme linked thinktanks, CSOs and universities (all crucial components of civil society) with country climate negotiators to provide training and technical advice to strengthen their negotiation strategies; it also gave countries financial and legal help.[6] Drawing on such models will help ensure that those leading the process to determine the GGA collaborate with civil society to bridge capacity gaps.

2. Harness synergies for data and reporting

CSOs can help Parties identify and harness synergies between complementary agendas.

Countries already report on multiple goals and targets for overlapping issues and agendas across various international agreements. This includes mandatory reporting and communications vehicles under the Paris Agreement — such as nationally determined contributions, biennial transparency reports and adaptation communications — and voluntary reporting on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and other commitments.

Defining and reporting against the GGA should draw on these datasets, which several national and subnational institutions already produce to track progress on overlapping agendas. Civil society can help join the dots between these institutions or datasets, enhancing coordination and supporting a more cohesive data architecture at national and subnational levels. There is a precedent in India, where World Wildlife Fund India has engaged with ministries working across different agendas to catalyse a degree of cohesion and coordination through integrated action and data sharing.[7]

3. Facilitate learning and coordination

As Parties make progress on the GGA, CSOs can ensure effective learning on what is and is not working to enable them to replicate successful approaches and avoid those that do not deliver impact. CSOs are uniquely placed to enrich the data emanating from government agencies by complementing them with qualitative insights gathered by domain experts or citizen science processes involving those who are engaged in or benefiting from adaptation initiatives.[8]

Parties with more resources and capacity to engage with the many, highly technical, dimensions of the negotiation process are in a position to support, mentor and guide less well-resourced Parties and negotiators. Through peer-to-peer learning, Parties can align their negotiation positions and develop common agendas, strategies and tactics to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes in complex negotiations. But this is difficult to do within formal UNFCCC processes. CSOs, on the other hand, can catalyse cooperation in the GlaSS by hosting workshops and other events that lead to learning and cooperation between Parties.[9]

4. Ensure a whole-of-society approach

CSOs can play an important role in ensuring marginalised voices are heard and the GlaSS

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Box 1. A whole-of-society approach

A whole-of-society approach "…requires an enabling environment that promotes partnership and contributions by a wide range of stakeholders."[10] Acknowledged as a guiding principle for several salient development policy processes, most notably the SDGs,[11] a whole-of-society approach to decision making and consensus building recognises different constituencies — from citizens to the private sector, civil society, unions, and national, provincial and local governments — as valued participants. This ensures that both the people tasked with executing decisions and those affected by them recognise the legitimacy of these decisions.

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process adopts a whole-of-society approach (see Box 1). Ample data demonstrate that the politically marginalised and less powerful in society are also most vulnerable to climate impacts in many contexts.[12] As such, it is vital they are heard. There is a strong precedent for civil society ensuring that marginalised voices are included in international policy process. For example, nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) representing the rights of disabled people were recognised in and influenced decision making around the Sendai Framework. Their efforts led to the 2015 Dhaka Declaration, a joint agreement on disability and disaster risk management between governments, United Nations bodies, and regional and international NGOs[13] that committed those executing the Sendai Framework to put the needs of disabled people at the forefront of risk reduction actions.

Party-led processes, where decision making is mostly led by national governments, may inadvertently ignore, supress or sideline the people who are on the frontline of climate risk. Listening to their voices helps ensure adaptation action aligns with cultural practice, incorporates generational or traditional knowledge and integrates into local institutions. Precedents for this include the Local Communities and Indigenous People's Platform, operationalised at COP23, which provided a formal mechanism for including CSOs representing local communities and Indigenous Peoples in discussions around the Paris Agreement.[14]

Creating similar platforms specifically for the GGA can help make the process more representative. CSOs can ensure the GGA and GlaSS processes and outcomes are fairer and more equitable, especially for those whose voices are often less heard. But this is no replacement for formally including diverse marginalised social groups in UNFCCC processes, which will help ensure long-term, sustainable and resilient development.

5. Highlight transboundary risks

Events in the geographical boundaries of one country can sometimes put people in another country at risk. And, as socioecological systems (the spheres where climate risks unfold) cut across political boundaries, there is a danger that, being country-led, transboundary issues may be under-represented in the GlaSS. CSOs are well placed to highlight these issues[8] and can learn from the Climate Action Network, a global alliance of CSOs working on issues of climate and development,[15] and the Stockholm Environment Institute's Adaptation Without Borders initiative,[16] which have for many years raised transboundary risk issues in international policy forums.

6. Emphasise accountability

Civil society has a crucial role to play in demanding accountability, which can include producing reports and submissions that analyse and assess progress, scrutinising and commenting on national communications that demonstrate a country's progress on the GGA, or running strategic media campaigns to ensure authorities treat this agenda with the importance it deserves. For example, Bangladesh has been a global pioneer in mainstreaming climate change in financial planning through annual climate budgets. But analysis of its climate finance architecture by civil society watchdog Transparency International established an inconsistency in transparency and reporting across contributors, government agencies and external sources of adaptation finance information.[17] Specifically, it found a transparency deficit in decision making around climate finance allocations, with CSOs unable to adequately verify investments made and weak coordination between institutions charged with managing climate finance investments. These findings, alongside pressure from civil society, triggered the government of Bangladesh to establish a framework for transparently managing domestic and international finance.

7. Raise ambition

To ensure that the GGA does not become a simple accounting exercise, CSOs can help spur

governments to move away from business as usual towards 'business unusual'.[18] They can do this by highlighting value added during GlaSS deliberations to encourage countries to initiate new and innovative programmes and policies for meeting climate change with the scale and urgency needed. Working with the media, CSOs can highlight instances where governments repackage existing activities to report them against the GGA and where the GGA catalyses fresh policies and programmes. Communicating emerging outcomes from the GGA process ensures those that are making progress are recognised and celebrated, which can spark cooperative competition among Parties.

Action across these seven priorities will ensure a more accountable, inclusive and therefore more effective GGA that supports vulnerable communities to not only function, but flourish, despite a changing climate.

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Knowledge Products

Notes

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