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HKH2Glasgow: Promoting Ambitious Climate Action for the Hindu Kush Himalayas



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In November 2021, the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP26) met in Glasgow, UK, to deliver on the ambitions set out in the Paris Agreement. The International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) worked with its regional member countries of the Hindu Kush Himalaya (HKH) region to ensure mountain voices were heard at COP26. To do so, we launched the HKH2Glasgow campaign. The aim of the campaign was to (1) promote ambitious climate action for the HKH at COP26 and (2) launch a framework to scale up investment in mountain-specific climate priorities.

Introduction

In November 2021, the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) met in Glasgow, UK, for COP26 to deliver on the ambitions set out in the Paris Agreement.

This decade demands an agreement and deliberations on actions that will limit the rise of the global temperature to 1.5°C, strengthen the capacity of nature and people to adapt to climate change, and align financial flows to zero-carbon and climate-resilient pathways.

The International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) worked with its regional member countries of the Hindu Kush Himalaya (HKH) region to ensure mountain voices were heard at COP26. To do so, we launched the HKH2Glasgow campaign. The aim of the campaign was to (1) promote ambitious climate action for the HKH at COP26 and (2) launch a framework to scale up investment in mountain-specific climate priorities.

By promoting mountain voices at COP26 and by launching the framework, the HKH2Glasgow campaign contributed to climate-resilient mountain societies, carbon-neutral mountain economies, and climate-aligned financial flows in the HKH.

ICIMOD worked with 3 stakeholder groups to identify and amplify key messages for COP26:

- **HKH countries:** We worked with UNFCCC national focal points, HKH High-Level Task Force members, and HKH ministers, ambassadors, and youth champions to design,

amplify, and implement regional solutions to climate change.

- **COP26 presidency:** We collaborated with the COP26 presidency to amplify mountain voices at COP26. This included engagement with the COP26 President, the UK International Champion on Adaptation and Resilience for the COP26 Presidency, and the Regional Ambassador for Asia Pacific and South Asia of the UK COP26 Presidency.
- **Friends of the HKH:** We also engaged with the private sector, financial institutions, and development partners to develop, amplify, and implement ambitious climate action for the region. For instance, we set up collaborations with the Tourovation Hub in Nepal to scale up investment in green tourism enterprises and with the Bank of Bhutan to identify innovative financial instruments to support investment in green, resilient, and inclusive development pathways.

Drawing on evidence and consultations, the HKH2Glasgow campaign amplified 3 initiatives at COP26 to promote ambitious climate action for the HKH. These initiatives are linked to the HKH Call to Action elaborated in our previous MountainPlatform article (Wester et al 2020).

As part of the science-policy uptake process, beginning with the publishing of the *Hindu Kush Himalaya Assessment* report (Wester et al 2019), in late 2020, ICIMOD facilitated a historic Ministerial Mountain Summit with ministers from across all 8 HKH countries. The ministers signed a declaration agreeing to strengthen regional cooperation in the HKH (Wester et al 2020); to promote a united voice for the HKH at regional, global, and UN platforms; to enhance the uptake of scientific evidence for improving policies in the region focusing on mountain environments and livelihoods; and to assess the feasibility of establishing a regional institutional mechanism.

The 3 initiatives at COP26

The pulse of the planet

The HKH is the pulse of the planet. The region, which covers 4 million km² and spreads across 8 countries, is home to 4 global biodiversity hotspots. With almost 20% of its

landmass under snow cover, it has the largest reserves of ice outside the polar regions and contains the headwaters of 10 major Asian river systems. The region supports the livelihoods of 240 million people living in the mountains and 1.65 billion people living downstream. Around 3 billion people—almost a third of humanity—benefit from the food produced in the HKH river basins.

However, the HKH is at the frontline of the climate emergency. Even in a 1.5°C higher temperature world, glaciers in this region are projected to lose a third of their volume by the end of this century (Kraaijenbrink et al 2017). An increase in temperature and changes in precipitation have already impacted mountain communities negatively. The impact of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), the disease caused by the novel severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), has further exacerbated the vulnerability of mountain communities. There is an urgent need to strengthen the resilience of mountain ecosystems and the people who rely on them.

A “Race to Resilience and to Zero” must focus on protecting and promoting the pulse of the planet, the HKH. Our collective mountain voice at COP26 helped to highlight the need for ambitious climate action for the region.

Mountains of opportunity: scaled-up investment in mountain-specific climate priorities

Scaled-up investment is required to deliver ambitious climate action for the HKH. This includes an increase in financial resources, enabling policy, technology, and capacity to transition to a green, resilient, and inclusive world by 2030 (Macquire et al 2020).

The *Hindu Kush Himalaya Assessment* states that the HKH region constitutes the largest glacierized region outside the poles and provides the headwaters for several major rivers (Sharma et al 2019). Since the 1960s, the HKH has experienced significant changes in the mean temperature and extremes of temperature and precipitation, accompanied by glacier mass loss and retreat, increased rates of snowmelt, and permafrost degradation (Bolch et al 2019; Krishnan et al 2019). An estimated impact on the economy of the HKH is not available; hence, it is an area of great concern because most of the climate targets mentioned in countries’ Nationally Determined Contributions are conditional on external support. For instance, Bangladesh has estimated that the cost of adaptation between 2015 and 2030 will be US\$ 40 billion (MoEFCC 2020). However, the recent annual total funding allocation has been around US\$ 1.2 billion, which is substantially lower than the amount required (Anderson et al 2017).

Similarly, our 8 HKH countries have set ambitious policy targets to support adaptation and reduce carbon emissions through actions in key sectors like agriculture, water, energy, industry, and transport. However, they lack the resources to implement and assess the impact of these actions (UNEP 2021).

Policymakers in HKH regional member countries recognize that aligning measures to address climate change and COVID-19 will provide “mountains of opportunity” to scale up investment in green, resilient, and inclusive development.

Investment in 6 aligned measures—nature-based solutions, resilient mountain infrastructure, resilient

mountain enterprises, resilient labor markets, shock-responsive social-protection systems, and climate responsive financial systems—will enable mountain communities to transition into resilient and carbon-neutral societies by 2030.

Power of 8: strengthen cooperation to deliver climate action at scale and with speed

Stakeholders across HKH member countries recognize that harnessing the power of the 8 countries will enhance regional and international cooperation for climate action. This includes cooperation to facilitate data sharing and jointly address transboundary climate risks, as well as cooperation to support regional and international learning and technology transfer for innovation, capacity building, and green infrastructure.

Next steps

ICIMOD has worked with relevant stakeholders to develop a common position paper (Kaur et al 2021) and convened high-level events to amplify key asks for the HKH at COP26.

At COP26, ICIMOD’s HKH2Glasgow campaign, along with the leaders of the 8 HKH countries, called on the wider global community to act now to protect and promote the pulse of the planet. Through cooperation and coordinated efforts—harnessing the power of 8—the HKH countries’ leaders can work with friends across the world to increase technical and scientific cooperation and invest in the mountains of opportunity that the HKH has to offer.

We at ICIMOD will continue to work with our regional member countries to deliver ambitious climate action after COP26.

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WEBSITES

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 HKH High-Level Task Force: <https://www.icimod.org/deepening-regional-cooperation-for-climate-action-hkh-high-level-task-force-convenes/HKH2Glasgow>: <http://www.icimod.org/cop26>
 The Hindu Kush Himalaya Ministerial Mountain Summit 2020: <https://www.icimod.org/hkhmms/>
 The Pulse of the Planet: <https://www.icimod.org/who-we-are/the-pulse-of-the-planet/>
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 UNFCCC national focal points: <https://unfccc.int/process/parties-non-party-stakeholders/parties/national-focal-point>
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