

Adaptation Without Borders:

A brief to participants in COP27

The insights emerging from Adaptation Without Borders challenge a narrative that has long been embraced in climate policy: that adaptation is a local challenge, while mitigation is a global concern.

Climate risk is a shared reality; adaptation must now become a shared responsibility. If we reframe adaptation as a global challenge, what new forms of international cooperation and multilateral climate action await us?

Key messages on transboundary climate risks

- The impacts of climate change have knock-on effects across national borders; even local climate impacts can have regional or global repercussions. We call these transboundary and cascading climate risks, and they are expected to increase as global warming accelerates. Despite their scale and danger, they represent a major 'blind spot' in climate adaptation.
- Adaptation actions also have transboundary and cascading effects and can create both winners and losers. Adaptation in one place could deliver 'shared benefits' by strengthening resilience in another. However, it could redistribute – rather than reduce – vulnerability across borders or even exacerbate risk in other places.
- The impacts of transboundary climate risks go beyond neighbouring countries, such as those that share a river or mountain range. In a world that is interconnected through trade, finance, natural resources and people on the move, transboundary climate risks cascade across countries and even regions that are many thousands of miles apart.
- Transboundary climate risks interact with and compound non-climate drivers, including economic shocks, health crises, social unrest and geopolitical tensions to catalyze or exacerbate systemic risks. They are, therefore, a threat to the world's economic, environmental and social stability.
- Transboundary climate risks can undermine food and water security, trade and energy supplies, jobs and livelihoods, equity and wellbeing, and national social and economic development. Wherever they arise, they are likely to hit the poorest and most vulnerable people first and hardest, exacerbating inequities and the underlying drivers of their vulnerability.
- If we fail to understand transboundary climate risks, we seriously underestimate our vulnerability to the impacts of climate change. No country is immune: every country is exposed to these risks. Some of the wealthiest economies are highly exposed because of their hyper-integration with global markets and networks. Others – including those countries that bear the least responsibility for the climate crisis – face the largest adaptation challenges.
- A failure to understand transboundary climate risks means that we underestimate the scale and nature of the global efforts needed to adapt. But there is also an opportunity here. If we clearly identify and assess the shared benefits of systemic resilience, donors, banks and private actors are more likely to invest in reducing climate risk through adaptation as well as mitigation.
- The window for action is closing as people and systems reach their limits to adaptation. Rising to the global adaptation challenge requires:
 - new narratives of how risk and resilience extend across borders
 - new initiatives that go beyond local-scale projects and domestic policies, putting international cooperation and climate diplomacy at the heart of adaptation efforts
 - new actors in finance, foreign affairs and trade ministries, working hand-in-hand with the environment ministries that often lead national adaptation planning.

“Regional bodies and organizations can play a much greater role in helping their members build resilience to transboundary climate risks, to coordinate their adaptation plans and to strengthen regional cooperation on adaptation.”

- The transboundary nature of risk means that no country can achieve resilience to climate change by adapting on its own. We need, as matter of urgency, a new kind of global accountability and solidarity on adaptation.

Key messages and recommendations for action at the global level

- Some transboundary climate risks are of a level of complexity and magnitude that they warrant being framed as ‘systemic climate risks’. These require global attention and action. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) provides a useful framework for the better management of these systemic risks.
- Transboundary climate risks reinforce the importance of the global goal on adaptation in the Paris Agreement. The goal gives us the chance to address this major blind spot in our adaptation efforts and to spell out why adaptation is a global challenge that demands a global response. It also presents us with an opportunity to strengthen cooperation on adaptation to manage the cascading nature of climate risk. Meeting the global goal on adaptation requires an urgent response to systemic risks that transcend political borders.
- This framing of the goal builds the case for greater ambition and action on adaptation. The science is clear: current climate adaptation is too incremental and small in scale. It has lagged behind mitigation in generating a truly global, multilateral effort and in capturing attention within climate diplomacy. The global goal on adaptation presents a critical opportunity to change this.
- Negotiators in the Glasgow–Sharm El-Sheikh work programme should:
 - push for the global goal on adaptation to strengthen transformational adaptation to transboundary and cascading climate risks through any objectives or targets that are agreed
 - propose that one of the eight workshops under the work programme focus on transboundary climate risks in 2023

- seize the opportunity of this work programme to catalyze enhanced international cooperation on adaptation, including in the design, implementation and recommendations of its workshops.
- Global resilience is more than the sum of national adaptation efforts. Negotiators and observers should raise the issue of transboundary climate risk in the adaptation dialogues under the global stocktake. If we are to accurately assess progress in building resilience to the impacts of climate change, the global stocktake must capture progress in adapting to transboundary climate risks as well as direct climate risks.
- Climate action is being hampered by current divides between developing and developed countries. When governments realize that all countries are exposed to transboundary climate risks, that no nation can insulate itself or build resilience by acting alone, they could and should overcome these divides. One way to do this is to form new coalitions of Parties and non-Party stakeholders to drive efforts to frame and address transboundary climate risks under the UNFCCC, drawing inspiration from other multi-Party and multi-actor initiatives, such as the Climate and Clean Air Coalition.

Key messages and recommendations for action at the regional level

- Some transboundary climate risks that cannot be managed effectively at a national level should be managed at a regional or global level. The spill-over effects of adaptation responses – known as ‘transboundary maladaptation’ – are a case in point. ‘Response measures’ – as defined under the UNFCCC – could be invoked in the context of adaptation negotiations in the coming years, particularly where there are heightened tensions between neighbours. Greater cross-border coordination at regional and global scales would help to avoid such tensions in response to the climate crisis.
- Regional bodies and organizations can play a much greater role in helping their members build resilience to transboundary climate risks, to coordinate their adaptation plans and to strengthen regional cooperation on adaptation. Regional adaptation plans have a role to play in identifying such opportunities, as we see in plans led by the European Union, the African Union and others that recognize the need for cooperation beyond the classic example of transboundary river basins.
- We are not starting with a blank slate. There are existing examples of regional governance mechanisms that are suited to managing specific risks, such as transboundary ecosystems. But we need new forms of regional cooperation to manage other kinds of

transboundary climate risk as well as to strengthen regional integration, harmonization and cooperation on adaptation.

Key messages and recommendations for action at the national level

- Climate risks and our adaptation to them can no longer be framed solely as local or domestic issues. Siloed approaches to the governance of transboundary climate risks do not work, nor can any nation manage adaptation to them on its own.
- Adaptation policies must look beyond the classic 'one-risk in one-context approach'. Nationally determined contributions and adaptation communications under the UNFCCC should identify and assess the risks that a country is likely to be exposed to from abroad. They should also identify areas where their own domestic climate risk could create or exacerbate the vulnerabilities of countries and communities elsewhere. This requires capacity building and financial support to avoid any increase in the already heavy burden placed on national adaptation planners.
- Adaptation planning and reporting documents should consider the full range of options that could best manage transboundary climate risks. Some risks can be managed at the national level through domestic adaptation action; others require bilateral collaboration to reduce the risk at the source, or at one or more 'chokepoints' along the cascade of impacts; and others require multilateral cooperation to build resilience throughout the system. The more complex the risk, the more cooperation is needed. When identifying adaptation responses, planners should also assign clear risk ownership to individuals and departments or other actors, to ensure the implementation of measures to build resilience.
- National adaptation planners should work across government to include and engage actors from a diverse range of ministries, including trade, finance, foreign policy and agriculture. Planners should also be supported to enhance their cooperation and collaboration with others beyond their jurisdictions to draft and implement national adaptation plans in the context of their transboundary effects. This will help to avoid adaptation that exacerbates inequities between countries and support 'just resilience' or a just transition for adaptation.
- While countries share risks, they may also share the benefits of adaptation. The identification and articulation of how efforts to mitigate or manage a transboundary risk in one country can also support regional and global resilience should strengthen the business case for adaptation and increase climate finance and investment.

“Recognizing the rewards that could be reaped from adapting to transboundary climate risks generates new motives to invest in adaptation – motives that go beyond historical and moral responsibilities.”

Key messages and recommendations for multilateral adaptation funders

- Current approaches to multilateral adaptation finance often overlook transboundary climate risks and focus primarily on local adaptation to direct impacts within individual countries. Multilateral finance can and should address these types of risk.
- Current models of adaptation finance offer opportunities to better address some transboundary climate risks. There are, for example, minimal barriers to the implementation of regional climate finance initiatives. Other types of transboundary climate risks, however, require a broader rethinking of modes of financial intervention and the involvement of new multilateral actors.
- Recognizing the rewards that could be reaped from adapting to transboundary climate risks generates new motives to invest in adaptation – motives that go beyond historical and moral responsibilities. Specifically, this is an opportunity to deliver shared benefits, with investments in systemic resilience benefiting both recipient and funder countries.

Conclusions

- Global, regional and national efforts to respond to the climate crisis cannot succeed without understanding and addressing transboundary climate risks.
- These risks present profound dangers, but they also present opportunities to build our collective resilience and to share the benefits of coordinated adaptation activities worldwide.
- As a result, an approach based on solutions to transboundary climate risks is, by its very nature, an approach that is more equitable, more just and more likely to succeed.

Adaptation Without Borders is a global partnership working to strengthen systemic resilience to the cross-border impacts of climate change. We identify and assess transboundary climate risks, appraise the options to better manage those risks and support policymakers, planners and the private sector to develop climate-resilient and inclusive solutions. We catalyse new alliances and forms of cooperation on adaptation that pave the way towards a more sustainable and resilient world.

adaptationwithoutborders.org



The Global Transboundary Risk Report 2023



In early 2023, Adaptation Without Borders will publish the first ever synthesis report on transboundary climate risk at the global scale. This report will explore 10 globally significant risks to natural resources (terrestrial and marine), the economy (finance, agricultural commodities, industrial supply chains and energy) and society (livelihoods, health, mobility and wellbeing). Follow www.adaptationwithoutborders.org for updates.

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