



*COP28 COMPASS*

## **ROAD TO DUBAI AND THE GLOBAL GOAL ON ADAPTATION**

### **Abstract**

United Arab Emirates will host the 28th Conference of the Parties (COP28) under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) from 30 November 2023 to 12 December 2023. A robust, equitable, and flexible framework on the Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA) will be a key determinant of the success of COP28. This paper reviews the discussions around the GGA framework to provide perspectives on what could be a robust, equitable, and flexible outcome of the GGA process at COP28. The definition of adaptation lays emphasis on human and natural systems and not countries. A paradigm shift and redefining of the problem statement in the climate regime is needed when implementing the GGA framework. There is a need to peg vulnerability from being viewed as only a country-centric approach. Identifying vulnerability hotspots supplemented by formulating people-centric and nature-centric approaches in climate negotiations is needed.

### **Keywords**

climate negotiations, multilateralism, COP28, adaptation, global goal on adaptation

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## 1. Introduction: Road to Dubai

United Arab Emirates will host the 28th Conference of the Parties (COP28) under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) from 30 November 2023 to 12 December 2023. COP28 is taking place at a time when the world is confronted by the triple challenges of planetary crises, sliding back of key sustainable development goals, and the ever-growing conflict situation threatening world peace. The principles of equity and ‘common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities’, or CBDR-RC, and the principle of ‘polluters pay’ are the key to inclusive, rules-based, ambitious, substantive outcomes at COP28 and beyond.

A key item for discussion at COP28 will be the Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA) framework under the Glasgow–Sharm el-Sheikh (GlaSS) work programme. The Provisional Agenda for COP28, Item 8(a) of CMA (Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement) will consider GGA. Joint agenda items 3(a) of Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA) and 12(a) of Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI) will also consider GGA. Presently, there is no dedicated agenda item of GGA that is mentioned in the COP agenda.

The Working Group II of the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) ascertains with very high confidence that global warming, reaching 1.5°C in the near term, would cause unavoidable increases in multiple climate hazards and present multiple risks to ecosystems and humans. The UNFCCC lays the foundation stone for adaptation in the international climate change context. Adaptation as a concept gains importance through the UNFCCC’s objective wherein the interlinkages of the necessity of emission reduction, potential climate impacts, and adaptation as a method of combating these impacts are drawn (UNFCCC, 1992).

According to the IPCC, adaptation is defined as, ‘In human systems, the process of adjustment to actual or expected climate and its effects, to moderate harm or exploit beneficial opportunities. In natural systems, the process of adjustment to actual climate and its effects; human intervention may facilitate adjustment to expected climate and its effects’ (IPCC, 2023a).

The complexity arising from uncertain climatic conditions of countries renders adaptation action subject to a ‘no one size fits all’ solution. Though countries have been attempting to

incorporate and implement climate adaptation, the struggle of lack of resources, finances, political commitment, and a low sense of urgency, among others, is inevitable (IPCC, 2023b).

### **2. Adaptation in Climate Negotiations**

Prior to 2015, adaptation was mainly considered a national concern, with the international system having no accountability to address the adaptation challenges. The major focus was on institution building and information sharing. In terms of institution building, the funding mechanisms developed were the Least Developed Countries Fund (LDCF), Adaptation Fund, and Adaptation Committee, and adaptation information was communicated primarily through National Communications, National Adaptation Plans, Nairobi Work Programme, and the Cancun Adaptation Framework (Ngwadla, 2022). The Bali Action Plan adopted through COP13 played a significant role in promoting adaptation action by providing forward-looking decisions that directed the negotiation talks around climate change at the global level. In 2013, it was the African Group of Negotiators that suggested the concept of a Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA) at the Ad-hoc Working Group on the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action (ADP). They suggested interlinkage between climate impacts and adaptation costs with long-term temperature goals (Ngwadla, 2022). Subsequently, in 2014, the Independent Association of Latin America and the Caribbean (AILAC) supported the development of a GGA, believing it to be laying the vision for the international endeavour for adaptation (Wilkinson et al., 2021).

Article 7 of the Paris Agreement provides a mandate for GGA. Paragraph 1 of Article 7 of the Paris Agreement states that ‘parties hereby establish the global goal on adaptation 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 referred to in Article 2’. Paragraph 14 (d) of Article 7 of the Paris Agreement also links the GGA to the global stocktake process to ‘review the overall progress made in achieving the global goal on adaptation referred to in paragraph 1 of this Article’.

Though the inclusion of GGA acts as the foundation for strengthening global adaptation action, there was no concrete development until 2021. At COP26, the Glasgow–Sharm el-Sheikh (GlaSS) work programme, a two-year programme (2022–23), was established for operationalizing GGA through enhancing ‘understanding, conceptualizing, and achieving goals’ (UNFCCC, 2022a). Parties agreed to the development of a GGA framework to be finalized and adopted at the fifth session of CMA in COP28. Paragraph 10 of Decision 3,

CMA.4 lists key elements of the GGA framework, such as dimensions, themes, cross-cutting considerations, and sources of information (UNFCCC, 2023a). Box 1 captures the eight objectives of the GlaSS Work Programme.

### **Box 1: Eight Objectives of the GlaSS Work Programme**

- (1) Enhance adaptation action and support
- (2) Assess progress on GGA through indicators, data, and metrics
- (3) Review GGA progress to inform the first and subsequent global stocktakes
- (4) Enhance national planning and implementation of adaptation actions
- (5) Enable parties to better communicate on adaptation
- (6) Facilitate robust systems for monitoring and evaluating adaptation actions
- (7) Strengthen implementation of adaptation actions in vulnerable developing countries
- (8) Enhance complementarities between communication and reporting instruments

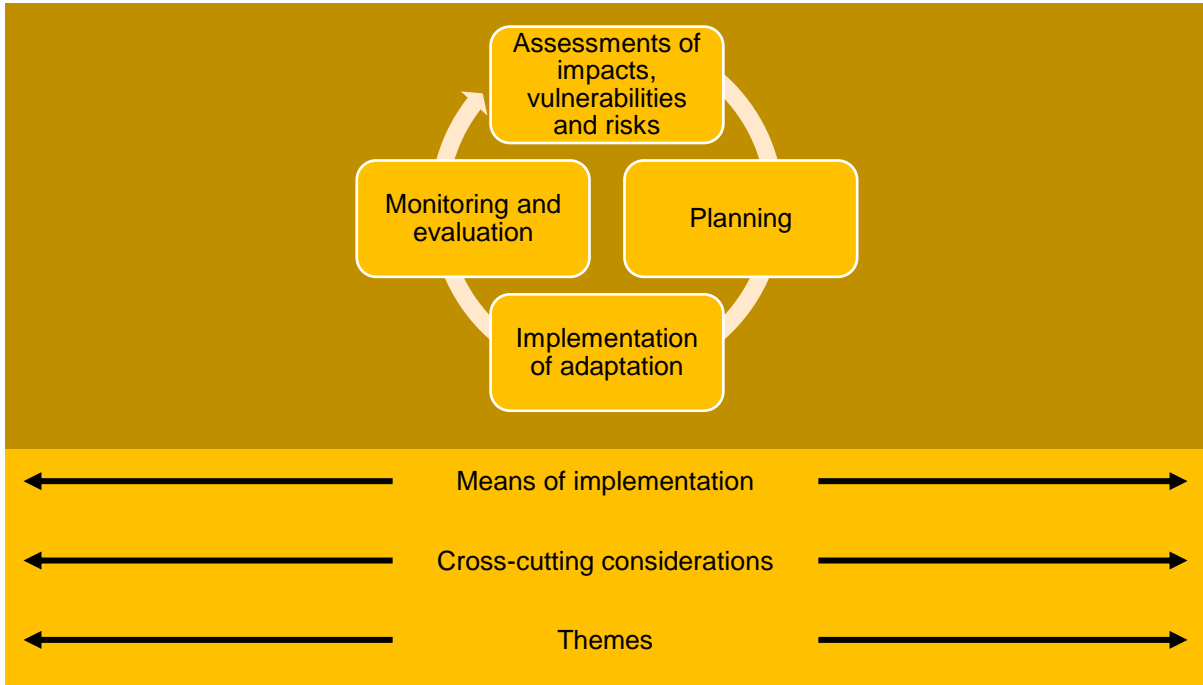
*Source: Based on Paragraph 7 of Decision 7/CMA.3 (UNFCCC 2022a; 2022b; 2023a)*

### **3. Key Insights from GlaSS Work Programme Discussions**

Eight workshops were organized in 2022 and 2023 as a part of this GlaSS Work Programme towards enhancing GGA. The first four workshops were held in 2022. The first workshop focused on improving understanding of GGA, reviewing the progress towards it, and acquiring relevant knowledge and practices. Participants discussed conceptualizing the GGA, goals set under other forums (SDGs and Sendai Framework), examples of relevant targets at different levels, and planning for future workshops (UNFCCC, 2022b). Developing on the discussions of the first workshop and second workshop aimed at increasing adaptation action and support by discussing best practices and lessons gained in replicable adaptation actions, adaptation gaps and needs, adaptation efforts, linkages with global stocktake, and global temperature goals (UNFCCC, 2022b). The third workshop analysed the operations of multilateral review mechanisms under related conventions, processes, and frameworks. Herein, participants tried to examine the trajectory of these mechanisms in developing baselines and defining goals (UNFCCC, 2022b). In the fourth workshop, participants analysed the communication and reporting of adaptation priorities. Herein, the discussions revolved around reporting on adaptation under the UNFCCC and linkages with international frameworks and linkages to

global stocktake, among others (UNFCCC, 2022b). Figure 1 depicts the adaptation policy cycle, considered one of the key frameworks guiding the GGA discussions.

**Figure 1: Adaptation Policy Cycle**



The fifth workshop was undertaken in 2023, wherein the focus was on defining and conceptualizing transformational adaptation, indigenous peoples’ leadership in transformational adaptation, shifting mindsets and worldviews towards transformational adaptation, and national and regional perspectives on changing mindsets, developing a framework for GGA, and linkages with GST (UNFCCC, 2023b). The sixth workshop examined target-setting, metrics, indicators for GGA, and means of implementation, among others. It also analysed options for increasing efforts towards mainstreaming adaptation in national priority sectors (UNFCCC, 2023c). Next, the seventh workshop mainly focused on interfacing GGA with other processes, including GST and elements of the GGA framework (UNFCCC, 2023d). Box 2 depicts the structural elements guiding the discussions on GGA at COP28. The final workshop before COP28, held in September 2023, was themed around taking account of the GlaSS framework. Discussions around the processes and bodies involved in setting in motion the works on GGA were taken up (UNFCCC, 2023e). This included the rollout process subsequent to the agreement, communication of the framework to various stakeholders, review of the framework, subsequent reviews, and development of indicators and lessons from previous frameworks, among others. Ideas were shared for post-COP28 works



with timelines by some groups on topics including technical works, assessment of the progress of GGA, using that progress for GST, and mandates to review the framework. Suriname, on behalf of G77 & China, argued for the essentiality of stating targets, recognition of differentiated responsibility, and means of implementation within the GGA framework. These arguments were also supported by China and Maldives for SIDs, Argentina for ABU (Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay) and AILAC, Lesotho for Least Developed Countries (LDCs), and Saudi Arabia for the Arabic group. Kenya, on behalf of the African Group of Negotiators (AGN), argued for the importance of developing quantifiable time-bound measurable targets, with overarching targets for operationalizing GGA. Japan emphasized analysing the business potentials of adaptation models and thereby encouraging private sector financing.

### **Box 2: Structural elements of the GGA framework**

- Context
- Purpose
- Principles
- Overarching targets or high-level target priorities and/or messages
- Specific targets
- Cross-cutting considerations (participation, knowledge, and equity)
- Themes (health, ecosystems and biodiversity, poverty and livelihoods, food and agriculture, cities and settlements, water, tangible cultural heritage, mountain regions)
- Indicators
- Means of implementation and enabling conditions
- Role of the GGA framework in the GST
- Sources of information
- Assessment and review of the GGA framework
- Post COP 28 elements

*Source: Based on summaries of the seventh and eighth workshops under the Glasgow–Sharm el-Sheikh work programme on the global goal on adaptation in UNFCCC (2023)*

#### **4. Positions of Various Countries and Groupings**

A triad of positions is emerging. The position by G77 & China is underpinned by the importance of adaptation and the role of differentiation to reflect the reality of developing countries. The Global North takes a more technocratic approach, which is backed by optimism on the role of the private sector. On the other hand, the small island developing states emphasize limits to hard and soft adaptation that have been reached and that loss and damage are the way forward.

While on many fronts, the Global South appears generally united, the outlook of AILAC, which shifts the position from adaptation to loss and damage, may undermine GGA in terms of finance and other means of implementation. An overemphasis by the Global North on private sector finance may undermine access to resources by most vulnerable groups, including farmers, fishing communities, small enterprises, and other vulnerable segments in both human and natural systems.

### ***Global South***

G77 & China underscore the inclusion of finance, technology transfer, capacity building, their present situation, costs involved, and support requirements, especially for identifying progress in the achievement of GGA (G77 & China, 2022; 2023b; 2023c). Supporting target and/or indicator setting as part of the GGA framework, the group highlights the need for holding substantive discussions on this concern (G77 & China, 2023a). While submitting the structure of the draft decision on the GlaSS work programme on GGA at the Bonn Conference, G77 & China reiterated the elements it desires to see in the draft GGA framework (including preambular text, capture progress on the GlaSS work programme, the establishment of GGA framework among others).

Submitting on behalf of the Like-Minded Developing Countries (LMDC) group concerning the First Technical Dialogue of Technical Assessment of First GST, India cited IPCC's Sixth Assessment Report Working Group II (AR6-WG II), which emphasizes the existence of substantial adaptation gaps. The group highlighted limitations hindering the progress of adaptation action, including the non-existence of the definition of GGA quantitatively and qualitatively, inadequacy in recognition of adaptation gaps, and evaluation of adaptation progress. The LMDC group emphasized the need to assess the financial and technical support provided by developed countries to developing countries for meeting adaptation goals. Having high hopes from the GST, LMDC noted that GST may be at the forefront of focusing on adaptation. LMDC proposed draft elements of the GGA work programme (LMDC, 2022a; 2022b; 2022c; 2022d). These included the guiding principles for the programme, its objectives, outcomes, and scope of the work programme, amongst others. LMDC suggested that parties finalize their development plans by 2030 and re-iterated its invitation to IPCC to revise its 1994 technical guidelines for evaluation of climate change impacts and adaptation and conduct a special report on GGA for considering framework targets and indicators as part of its seventh assessment cycle (LMDC, 2023a; 2023b).

Lesotho, on behalf of LDCs, acknowledging the present global adaptation gaps, argued the barriers to access climate finance. Observing this issue, LDCs suggested the need to transition to comprehensive society-wide responses and wanted enhanced global cooperation for finance, technology transfer, capacity-building initiatives, and technical support. The AGN agreed with G77 and China's demand for draft conclusions on the GGA framework comprising targets and indicators. It showed interest in holding substantive discussions on this concern and proposed quantifiable targets for climate information services, national adaptation plan developments, and adaptation implementation (AGN, 2023).

### ***Small Island Developing States***

Ahead of COP27, AILAC, along with ABU, advocated for a GGA framework comprising dimensions, sectors, cross-cutting approaches, indicators/metrics and/or targets, as appropriate, and clear sources of information (ABU & AILAC, 2022). In October 2022, they highlighted the hard and soft limits to adaptation of existing and insufficient mitigation pathways (AILAC, 2022). AILAC grouping has argued on the insufficiency of adaptation measures (AILAC, 2023). They also underscored the need for both qualitative and quantitative indicators. An example they gave is that the progress on adaptation should not be about the number of adaptation communications and national adaptation plans (NAPs) but also include qualitative criteria. AILAC cites IPCC's conclusion that with increasing global warming, losses and damages will increase and human and natural systems will reach adaptation limits. From AILAC's perspective, adaptation itself has limits, and hence, loss and damage need more focus. AOSIS (Alliance of Small Island States) argued for a more focused approach with respect to adaptation and means of implementation (AOSIS, 2023).

### ***Global North***

On the topic of adaptation, the European Union (EU) highlighted that adaptation demands urgent action and is difficult for the most vulnerable, including LDCs and Small Island Developing States (SIDS) (EU, 2023). The EU submitted the need for increased support to these groupings and suggested a community-based adaptation approach to be adopted. The EU stressed the necessity for collective action towards the adaptation policy cycle (climate change-related risk assessments; planning; implementation of adaptation priorities; monitoring, evaluation, and learning).

At the GST's Technical dialogue roundtable discussion on Adaptation and Loss and Damage in 2023, India stressed on means of implementation with finance, technology transfer, and

capacity-building for adaptation being a cross-cutting theme and forming the primary element for all other themes to be developed on. It highlighted that adaptation goals need to be absolute and not halfway in nature. Hence, it suggested overarching goals supported by output-oriented indicators instead of outcome-oriented targets. India also argued for being cautious in borrowing targets for adaptation from other international conventions as these conventions were developed for certain set goals and objectives (India, 2023a; 2023b).

At the Bonn Climate Conference of 2023, the United Kingdom (UK) submitted a proposal to structure the GlaSS work programme on GGA. It is worth mentioning that the submission accounted for certain key elements, including enabling policy conditions, global societal transitions, the role of collective action, and interlinkages to GST (UK, 2023a; 2023b). The United States argued that the GGA framework is required to catalyse adaptation action, decrease maladaptation, and facilitate flexibility to accommodate country-led approaches (USA, 2023a; 2023b). Japan further advocated encouraging private-sector investment in adaptation in support of existing public funding (Japan, 2022). Japan proposed a draft structure for the GlaSS work programme on GGA and reiterated the significance of the private sector in climate adaptation. Japan's perspective is to bring synergies in the workings of the mitigation work programme, GlaSS, and other negotiating programmes instead of duplication of efforts (Japan, 2023).

### **5. The Road Ahead**

#### ***Building on a risk-based framework***

GGA should be built on a risk framework in the context of the temperature goals, which recognizes climate impacts. Baselines should consider vulnerability and risks associated with different temperature scenarios. IPCC's Sixth Assessment Report states that 'no single best approach or data source' exists for evaluating climate change adaptation progress at the global level. A holistic approach is required wherein a mix of methods and data sources needs to be utilized (Leiter, 2022). There is a dearth of data to effectively take actions for correcting the course of adaptation actions (Hugo et al., 2022). This dearth of data or lack of the best approach should not inhibit the adoption of a robust, equitable, and flexible framework for GGA.

#### ***Goals and indicator frameworks***

GGA framework must be specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time bound (SMART). It is important to link GGA to means of implementation, along with consideration

of being context-specific and based on both qualitative and quantitative methods (Kedia et al. 2022). An important outcome of COP28 could be that the global community commits to securing basic universal enablers of adaptation at all scales (for example, universal access to early warning systems). The global goal on adaptation must be a universal goal at the global aggregate level; it also needs bottom-up validation by vulnerable communities through multi-level and multi-scalar indicator frameworks.

A framework consisting of goals and targets, along with the elements listed in Box 2, should be adopted at COP28. In addition, an Inter-agency and Expert Group on GGA Indicators can be formed that could meet periodically to review the indicators. This group can assess the state of indicators and divide them into tiers based on methodology and data availability (Table 1). Unlike the SDGs, though, this tier classification may not be limited to only countries but can also consider global, regional, and other scales for earth systems. The baseline for a tier classification can be based on a comprehensive assessment by IPCC.

**Table 1: Possible Tier Classification with Scales for GGA Indicator Framework**

Tier	Description	Scales
Tier I	The indicator is conceptually clear, has an internationally established methodology and standards are available, and data are regularly produced.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Global</li> <li>• Regions</li> <li>• Countries</li> <li>• Sub-national</li> <li>• People</li> <li>• Ecosystems</li> </ul>
Tier II	The indicator is conceptually clear, has an internationally established methodology, and standards are available, but data are not regularly produced.	
Tier III	No internationally established methodology or standards are yet available for the indicator, but methodology/standards are being (or will be) developed or tested.	

Country-based systems can enhance synergies between the country’s priorities and existing global frameworks (for instance, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and the Sustainable Development Goals) (Beauchamp et al., 2021). However, these international frameworks aiming at a top-down approach encourage standardization, and the country reality’s needs to be reflected in indicators developed (Beauchamp & Józefiak, 2023). For instance, African countries have developed over 400 adaptation indicators for measuring and tracking the integration of adaptation in their national policies, specifically nationally determined contributions (NDCs) and NAPs. This indicates the varied country-specific needs and challenges with aggregating data at international and national levels (Nowak et al., 2021). Hence, adaptation actions should be governed by country-specific adaptation systems (Beauchamp et al., 2021). Multiple levels and scales of indicator frameworks can be encouraged, ranging from global, regional, national, sub-national, and local.

### ***Focus on means of implementation***

Arguments also indicate excess focus being placed on metrics and indicators that tend to sideline the actual need for the development of country-specific systems (Beauchamp et al., 2021). For carrying out activities under the methodological stage (for instance, data collection) and adaptation implementation activities, a need for resources and capacities arises. Means of implementation, such as capacity-building on data systems, are crucial not only for MEL purposes but also to avoid maladaptation. All indicators, including input, output, and outcome indicators, are important. Indicators on climate finance and other means of implementation become crucial. Output indicators could be climate adaptation projects. Outcome indicators could improve the coping capacity of communities and natural ecosystems.

### ***Reporting formats***

Adaptation communications are usually communicated at the global level through NAPs, NDCs, and national communications (NCs). These country submissions are voluntary and lack a common periodicity for submissions (Hugo et al., 2022). On the other hand, there is a risk of the creation of additional reporting burdens for countries that are already grappling with reporting obligations. Hence, it is essential to acknowledge and support local and national multiple set-ups without creating additional reporting burdens (Zoysa et al., 2022). Reporting formats can be made simple where inputs from countries are needed. A simple questionnaire-based format can be considered instead of a comprehensive reporting mechanism.

### ***Linkages with NCQG, along with GST***

The report prepared by the Standing Finance Committee under the UNFCCC estimated that developing nations would need USD 5.8–5.9 trillion every year till 2030 to achieve less than half of their climate goals under the Paris Agreement (UNFCCC, 2021). The New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG), starting from 2025, is currently in the process of discussion; therefore, it must be based on the needs and requirements of the developing countries, especially considering the need to balance between adaptation climate finance and mitigation climate finance. Along with GST, NCQG must also be linked to the GGA framework.

The First Global Stocktake is based on a framework that does not include concrete metrics on a global goal on adaptation mandated by the Paris Agreement. GGA framework should have been in place before the post-2020 climate regime came into being. The COP28 is expected to act as the cornerstone in catering to the urgent demand of setting adaptation commitments, targets, and structured framework considering the complex dynamics within which climate

adaptation action operates. A robust, equitable, and flexible framework on GGA will be a key determinant of the success of COP28.

***Paradigm shifts needed and redefining the problem statement***

On a final note, the IPCC definition of adaptation emphasizes human and natural systems and not countries. A paradigm shift in the climate regime is needed regarding adaptation. There is a need to peg vulnerability from being viewed as only a country-centric approach. Identifying vulnerability hotspots supplemented by formulating people-centric and nature-centric approaches in climate negotiations is needed. In other words, there is a need to revisit the problem statement.

The problem statement needs to incorporate the identification of vulnerable segments at a more disaggregated level. For instance, it talks about a number of farmers who are impacted by slow onset events due to climate change, damage to ecosystems because of forest fires or adaptive capacity, and vulnerable communities due to sea-level rise. While the approach in climate change negotiations will be country-driven, the GGA framework implementation needs to factor in nuances and a disaggregate picture of vulnerability within countries.

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## **World Sustainable Development Summit**

The World Sustainable Development Summit (WSDS) is the annual flagship Track II initiative organized by The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI). Instituted in 2001, the Summit series has a legacy of over two decades for making ‘sustainable development’ a globally shared goal. The only independently convened international Summit on sustainable development and environment, based in the Global South, WSDS strives to provide long-term solutions for the benefit of global communities by assembling the world’s most enlightened leaders and thinkers on a single platform. Over the years, the Summit series has witnessed the participation of 54 Heads of State and Government, 103 Ministers, 13 Nobel Laureates, 1888 Business Leaders, 2745 Speakers, and 38,280 Delegates.

## **Act4Earth**

Act4Earth initiative was launched at the valedictory session of WSDS 2022. Building on the discussions of WSDS, this initiative seeks to continuously engage with stakeholders through research and dialogue. Act4Earth initiative has two components: **COP Compass** and **SDG Charter**. The COP Compass will seek to inspire and mobilize leadership at all levels, for inclusive transitions through ambitious and informed policies and measures which will enable paradigm shifts – towards meeting the UNFCCC and Paris goals through mitigation, adaptation and means of implementation. The SDG Charter will seek to identify gaps and suggest ways for strengthening and mainstreaming sustainable development in policy agendas for enhanced environmental, social, and economic outcomes.

## **Road to Dubai and the Global Goal on Adaptation**

*United Arab Emirates will host the 28th Conference of the Parties (COP28) under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) from 30 November 2023 to 12 December 2023. A robust, equitable, and flexible framework on GGA will be a key determinant of the success of COP28. This paper reviews the discussions around the GGA framework to provide perspectives on what could be a robust, equitable, and flexible outcome of the GGA process at COP28. The definition of adaptation lays emphasis on human and natural systems and not countries. A paradigm shift and redefining of the problem statement in the climate regime is needed when implementing the GGA framework. There is a need to peg vulnerability from being viewed as only a country-centric approach. Identifying vulnerability hotspots supplemented by formulating people-centric and nature-centric approaches in climate negotiations is needed.*