The Expert Dialogue on Mountains and Climate Change

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This advice is provided in response to ***Query 19/24***

Context

The SB's held the first Expert dialogue on mountains and climate change on the 5th of June 2024. This follows the mandate received in Decision 1/CMA.5 to hold the dialogue during the 60th session of the SBSTA.

Query

Please provide a characterization of the expert dialogue on mountains and climate change that took place at SB 60 and identify further entry points for these issues in other negotiation streams.

Summary:

The Expert Dialogue on mountains and climate change which took place during SB 60 in Bonn, seems to be a one-off event. However, as this is a party-driven process, Parties can decide to reconduct this Dialogue.

Parties and stakeholders gathered for the day and discussed a variety of issues with the underlying aim of identifying further opportunities to discuss mountains in the UNFCCC process. The dialogue should also contribute, among others, to the UAE Framework for Global Climate Resilience which is the result of the Glasgow-Sharm el-Sheikh (GlaSS) work program on the Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA) which complements the GGA and establishes 11 targets to frame the GGA and its assessment. The focus on the expert dialogue was on knowledge, experience and insights on strengthening the resilience of mountain ecosystems.

As this Expert Dialogue seems to be a one-off event, this query looks at other opportunities to discuss mountains in the context of the UNFCCC process. There are at least two potential opportunities. First, it would be useful to incorporate mountains into existing negotiation streams, specifically adaptation

and/or agriculture and technology and/or Research and Systematic Observation (RSO) which are of particular relevance to mountains. This would present various benefits which are explored in this advice. Second, an alternative method would be to look at creating a new workstream on mountains specifically as an agenda item, or even an amendment to the Paris Agreement or the Convention. However, this is unlikely to be successful for the foreseeable future. Thus, Parties interested in promoting mountains further in the UNFCCC are advised to start by including mountains in their submissions in other negotiation streams to raise awareness of the importance of the topic. This advice also maps upcoming relevant calls for submissions.

1. Characterisation of the Mountains Dialogue

Mandate

As the concept note indicates, "the Convention, in its preamble and in Article 4.8, identifies mountains as fragile ecosystems". However, mountains have historically had little space to be discussed in the UNFCCC process. More recently though, in Decision 22/CP.27, the need to address systematic observation gaps was emphasised, and particularly so in mountains.

The GST I (Decision 1/CMA.5) was an important step forward for mountainous countries' request to have a dedicated space at the climate change negotiations to discuss the impacts of climate change on mountainous regions. The preamble noted the "importance of ensuring the integrity of […] mountains", and in paragraph 181, Parties requested the Chair of the SBSTA to hold an expert dialogue on mountains and climate change at SB 60 (June 2024).

As the concept note on the dialogue indicates, in recent years, mountainous countries have expressed keen and repeated interest to have a dedicated space to discuss mountains in the UNFCCC process which has not led to any results. At CMA 5, during the opening ceremony, the additional proposed agenda items, including mountain ecosystems were rejected and COP 28 president, Sultan Al Jaber invited Parties to discuss these additional items under existing agenda items.[1] Thus, this expert dialogue represents a significant step forward in the recognition of the importance of mountain ecosystems, which, according to the concept note, governing bodies have repeatedly recognised, but in which little space has been afforded for discussions.

Nevertheless, the adoption of an expert dialogue rather than including mountain ecosystems as an additional agenda item has significant ramifications. An expert dialogue is generally temporary and serves simply to inform the UNFCCC processes, rather than taking COP decisions. As such, it is composed of experts and serves as an in-depth discussion of the issue.

Conversely, if mountain ecosystems were to be included as an additional agenda item, they would be given a space for specific discussion and decision-making, through the usual UNFCCC processes (informal consultations, plenary sessions, and contact groups). Additionally, agenda items are generally discussed over multiple sessions of the COP and CMA.

[1] IISD, 'Summary of the 2023 Dubai Climate Change Conference: 30 November – 13 December 2023' *Earth Negotiations Bulletin*, (18 December 2023), 12(842) <bit.ly/enb_cop28>.

The objective of this expert dialogue was to provide a space for stakeholders (scientists, policymakers and frontline communities, including specifically, Indigenous Peoples) to share knowledge, experience and insights on strengthening the resilience of mountain ecosystems.

Timeframe and procedure:

Paragraph 181 Decision 1/CMA.5 which set up the expert dialogue does not provide any clarity on the process or duration of the dialogue. However, it does indicate that it will be held 'at' SB 60. Thus, although unclear, the wording strongly suggests that it is regarded as a one-off event.

In terms of procedural elements of the dialogue, the Chair of the SBSTA convened in May 2024, an informal virtual meeting to inform the organization of the Expert Dialogue and to initiate technical discussions to inform the design and delivery of the Dialogue. Furthermore, prior to this virtual meeting, a concept note was prepared by the Secretariat informing Parties and observers of the mandate, context, objectives, scope and conduct of the Expert Dialogue.

Interestingly, the Dialogue was chaired by the Chair of the SBSTA which is not a typical occurrence (see for instance the Oceans and climate change dialogue which has been running since 2020 and was chaired during the June 2024 dialogue by Mr. Niall O'Dea from Canada and M. Julio Cordano from Chile).[2] Why the Decision on the mountains dialogue does not designate ad hoc chairs is not clear. However, the concept note referred above links the chairing of the Dialogue by the SBSTA Chair to 'the importance of mountains.' This might further indicate that this was conceived as a one-off event.

Parties were not asked for submissions prior to the expert dialogue, as such, the informal virtual meeting was the only avenue for Parties to influence the content of the dialogue.

Themes

As the dialogue's concept note indicates,[3] there were three main aims attached to the dialogue which reflect the structure of the dialogue:

1. Enhancing the understanding of climate change impacts on mountains and downstream communities, including in a transboundary context;
2. Showcasing solutions contributing to the resilience of mountain ecosystems to climate change;
3. Discussing ways to accelerate climate action at scale and at all levels, contributing to the resilience of mountain ecosystems, including in countries with fragile mountain ecosystems.

Five cross-cutting issues, identified by the secretariat from national reports (primarily NAPs and NDCs) of mountainous countries, were addressed in the thematic topics in the dialogue:

- Transformational adaptation
- Implementation of NAPs and NDCs

[2] The Oceans and Climate Change Dialogue was first established by Decision 1/CP.25 (Para. 31) as a one off event. Then in Decision 1/CP.26 (Para. 61) it became an annual dialogue held by the Chair of the SBSTA. Finally, in Decision 1/CP.27, it was decided that the dialogue would be chaired by two-co-facilitators from 2023, selected biennially by the Parties.
[3] Concept note, 22/04/2024.

- Transboundary ecosystems, impacts and actions
- Engagement of values, knowledge systems and worldviews of Indigenous Peoples and local communities
- Impacts on downstream communities and countries (non-mountainous).

Finally, according to this concept note, the dialogue intended to study possible actions in relation to research and systematic observation (RSO); dimensions of the iterative adaptation cycle; loss and damage; mitigation strategies; means of implementation and support. This shows that the Dialogue itself was intended to both identify and inform other relevant workstreams and suggests an opportunity, where participants have already identified these connections, to integrate mountains into those workstreams. The next section of this advice further elaborates on relevant negotiation streams.

The concept note also indicates that the Dialogue had an additional intention of contributing to the UAE framework for Global Climate Resilience which is the result of the Glasgow-Sharm el-Sheikh (GlaSS) work program on the Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA) which complements the GGA and establishes 11 targets to frame the GGA and its assessment. The Framework also includes cross-cutting considerations for countries to drive adaptation and implement the framework (Decision 2/CMA.5 paras 6-10).

Outcomes of the Dialogue:

The Secretariat, in coordination with the SBSTA Chair, is due to prepare an informal summary report of the discussions held at the dialogue. However, this has not, as of yet, been published,

Nevertheless, as reported by negotiation coverage by IISD, participants had the opportunity to discuss:[4]

- the importance of mountain regions in the global water cycle and the increasing dependence of lowland populations on mountain water runoff;
- impacts such as glacier loss, reduction of snow cover, and flood events;
- data and research gaps, such as on mountain medicinal plants and invasive alien species;
- the use of citizen science, for example to map water springs;
- Indigenous Peoples' intricate relationship with mountain ecosystems in terms of cultural and spiritual practice, as well as diets; and
- the importance of transboundary collaboration to accelerate adaptation efforts.

Following a first, introductory segment, setting the scene for the expert dialogue in the early morning, discussing key risks and impacts on mountainous ecosystems and their role in building resilience, Parties engaged in a technical segment from late morning. This was an opportunity for the expert panellists to present solutions and opportunities to build the resilience of these ecosystems.

The technical segment also involved a group exercise by region (African States, Asia-Pacific States, Latin American and Caribbean States, Eastern European States and Western European and other States). Each region reported back to the rest of the participants with information on existing

[4] IISD, 'Highlights and images for 5 June 2024', *Earth Negotiations Bulletin* (05 June 2024) <https://enb.iisd.org/bonn-climate-change-conference-sbi60-sbsta60-5june24>

knowledge and know-how, sharing examples of innovative solutions contributing to the resilience of mountainous ecosystems. They also offered key recommendations to scale up these solutions.

The African states highlighted the importance of recognising the synergies between healthy ecosystems and local livelihoods. This reflected the significance they placed on local communities' role in protecting mountains. Similarly, they suggested that innovation must be coupled with traditional knowledge and experience, from local communities and indigenous peoples.

The Asia and Pacific states emphasised the role of cross-border cooperation, and similarly to the African states, they explained that action must be community-based and involve indigenous peoples. They also argued for mountain regions to receive more support in research and to be incorporated more formally into the UNFCCC process.

The Latin American and Caribbean states' main argument was that any actions relating to mountains must be local, decentralised and incorporate indigenous peoples. They also explained the benefits of maintaining the expert dialogue as a permanent fixture.

Interestingly, opposed to the other States who all emphasised the role of local communities and indigenous peoples, the Eastern European states did not. They explained the benefit of incorporating mountains into NDCs and the importance of cooperation, notably for data sharing.

Finally, the Western European States combined many of the pre-explained points. They emphasised the importance of cooperation among states and the role NDCs and NAPs can play in accelerating action to build resilience. They also noted the role that local communities and indigenous peoples must play in this. Interestingly, they also noted that more funding was needed to reach these objectives.

The final segment of the expert dialogue involved a high-level concluding panel on accelerating climate action in mountains. The panel's focus was on building a collective vision for building the resilience of mountainous ecosystems. It involved discussions on leadership, political momentum under and outside the UNFCCC process and methods to achieve targets under the GGA in achieving long-term transformational and incremental adaptation.

Unfortunately, as the informal summary report has not yet been published, the role of the Expert Dialogue's contribution to the UAE framework for Global Resilience (the GGA framework) is unclear.

2. Other relevant negotiation streams

Previously, in this advice, it was noted that during the Expert Dialogue, participants identified certain workstreams as potential relevant negotiation streams in which the issue of mountains could be pursued further.

- Adaptation: As can be seen in the concept note, a lot of importance was placed on building the resilience of mountain ecosystems.
    - The UAE Framework for Global Climate Resilience (The GGA):
      Contained in art. 7 of the Paris Agreement, the GGA is designed to enhance adaptative capacity, strengthen resilience and reduce vulnerability to climate change through

financial support. As mentioned above, at CMA 5 Parties adopted the UAE Framework for Global Climate Resilience to pursue the work of the GGA.
This new Framework includes a range of thematic and dimensional targets for climate adaptation and resilience. The UAE Framework's targets include, among others, reducing impacts on mountain ecosystems by 2030. (Decision 2/CMA.5, para 9).

- Nairobi Work Programme (NWP)
  The Nairobi Work Programme on impacts, vulnerability, and adaptation to climate change, set up at COP 11 is designed to facilitate and catalyse the development and dissemination of information and knowledge that would inform and support adaptation policies and practices.
  As the concept note indicates, "SBSTA 59 noted that the matter of mountains and climate change would be considered at that session in the context of the 16th Focal Point Forum on mountains, high-latitude areas, and the cryosphere, and that the SBSTA Chair would ensure that mountainous ecosystems were addressed as a priority under the NWP." Thus, a link between mountains and the NWP has already been identified.
  In fact, the NWP contains a priority thematic area on mountains.[5] Due to the many issues mountain vulnerability touches upon (water supplies, climate regulation, impact on communities through flooding, displacement, economic activities, etc), it may therefore be more effective to use the NWP as the concentrated workstream dedicated to mountains under the UNFCCC, as opposed to a diluted approach across workstreams.
  Furthermore, it has a proven track record of close collaboration and work integration within Parties, expert groups and constituted bodies.[6]
  Finally, addressing mountain ecosystems within the adaptation workstream would be effective due to the existing collaboration between the NWP and UN Environment through the Global Adaptation Network to develop the Lima Adaptation Knowledge Initiative (LAKI) joint action pledge.[7] This initiative aims to enhance adaptation action in subregions by closing knowledge gaps and would be particularly relevant in mountain ecosystems due to the numerous knowledge gaps.

- Agriculture and technology:
  Mountain ecosystems are important hubs of agricultural practices and crucial for food security in many countries. The deterioration of mountain ecosystems, along with the effects of climate change (droughts, flooding...) place agricultural practices at risk in these areas.[8] This was highlighted by some of the Parties (African States and Eastern European

[5] FCCC/SBSTA/2024/3 <https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/sbsta2024_03_adv.pdf> paras 36-40
[6] Ibid, para 5.
[7] Ibid, paras 15-32.
[8] P.R. Shukla, J. Skea, R. Slade, R. van Diemen, E. Haughey, J. Malley, M. Pathak, J. Portugal Pereira (eds.) Technical Summary, 2019. In: Climate Change and Land: an IPCC special report on climate change, desertification, land degradation, sustainable land management, food security, and greenhouse gas fluxes in terrestrial ecosystems [P.R. Shukla, J. Skea, E. Calvo Buendia, V. Masson-Delmotte, H.-O. Pörtner, D. C. Roberts, P. Zhai, R. Slade, S. Connors, R. van Diemen, M. Ferrat, E. Haughey, S. Luz, S. Neogi, M. Pathak, J. Petzold, J.

States) during the Expert Dialogue. Thus, mountain ecosystems could be introduced into discussions on agriculture and food security.

Decision 3/CP.27 paras 2(s) and 9, on the Sharm el-Sheikh joint work on implementation of climate action on agriculture and food security recognises that there is a need to scale up the implementation of best practices, innovations and technologies that increase resilience in agricultural systems.
As such, the Parties have previously recognised a link between agriculture and technology. Thus, as it is understood that mountains play an important role in agriculture, and agriculture requires technology transfer and development, then, it is possible to envisage discussing mountains in both agriculture and technology workstreams.

- RSO

  Among the topics discussed during the expert dialogue, participants had the opportunity to discuss forward looking actions in relation to mountains in the RSO workstream.
  The RSO workstream is an interesting entry point for mountains due to the wide knowledge gaps identified in data concerning mountains. This was recognised in paragraph 30 of the SBSTA 59 conclusions[9] and in Decision 22/CP.27 (para. 3) on the 'Implementation of the Global Observation System'.
  Within the regional group discussions at the Expert Dialogue, all groups, except the African group mention 'research' and, or 'observation' within either their existing knowledge to enhance resilience of mountain ecosystems, or as key recommendations to do so.
  The Asia and Pacific States recommend that funding for research must be secured as a priority and expect support for research. The Latin American and Caribbean States explained that research, long-term monitoring and early warning systems were key elements of their existing knowledge. Western European States identified their practice of confirming geo-spatial mapping observation with local and indigenous peoples as key knowledge but recommended an expansion of observation. Similarly, the Eastern European States identified the lack of observation stations as a barrier to enhancing the resilience of the mountain ecosystem.
  From these breakout group findings, it is clear that Parties see RSO as a critical component of maintaining mountain ecosystems, thus, RSO could provide an entry point for this topic.

- Loss and Damage

  As the Parties highlighted during the Expert Dialogue,[10] there is concern that the impacts of climate change on mountain regions are not being sufficiently considered under Loss and Damage. Yet, much of the negative impacts of climate change on mountains will lead to irrecoverable loss.
  As the Functions of the Santiago Network indicate (Decision 19/CMA.3, para 9(b)), the Santiago Network is designed to catalyse demand-driven technical assistance for the implementation of relevant approaches to averting, minimizing and addressing loss and

Portugal Pereira, P. Vyas, E. Huntley, K. Kissick, M, Belkacemi, J. Malley, (eds.)].
<https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009157988.002> p. 56

[9] FCCC/SBSTA/2023/8 <https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/sbsta2023_08E.pdf>

[10] Asia-Pacific States, Latin American and Caribbean States and Eastern European States

damage in developing countries that are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change. It is clear that mountain regions and mountainous countries are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change,[11] thus, there is a space to discuss these issues within considerations of Loss and Damage.

Further, paragraph 9(c) indicates that one of the functions of the Santiago Network is to facilitate the consideration of a wide range of topics relevant to averting, minimizing and addressing loss and damage approaches, including but not limited to current and future impacts, priorities, and actions related to averting, minimizing and addressing loss and damage pursuant to the areas referred to in Article 8, paragraph 4 of the Paris Agreement. This is significant and can provide a further entry point for mountains into UNFCCC discussions as Article 8, paragraph 4 includes the resilience of ecosystems, which, as clearly indicated in the concept note and during the expert dialogue is of critical importance.

- Forestry: REDD+

  As was revealed during the breakout group sessions during the expert dialogue, forestry is a critical component of the safeguarding of mountain ecosystems. The African and Eastern European states decided that mountains should be included in the REDD+ as one of their key recommendations to accelerate climate action to build resilience of mountain ecosystems. Asia and Pacific States placed community-based forestry as key existing knowledge for higher forest cover and carbon sequestration. Finally, Eastern European states shared preventing deforestation and afforestation as one of their key existing knowledge elements.

  This reveals a general will to include mountains in discussions on forestry and REDD+.

  Additionally, it is worth noting that 40% of mountain areas are covered by forests,[12] thus it would be fully appropriate to discuss mountains within this workstream.

- Finance (NCQG)

  As is the case with many climate change issues, practical change is not possible without sufficient funding. Due to the threats identified for mountains, there is a need for increased funding to ensure the preservation of these ecosystems. However, this might not be the appropriate workstream to discuss mountains given that it is a particularly high-level discussion which has not involved funding for specific issues and has seen little progress in recent negotiations. Furthermore, although it was suggested by Latin American and Caribbean states, and Western European states during the Expert Dialogue, as well as the Asia-Pacific states in the context of research funding, it does not seem to have been a principal preoccupation for Parties

[11] See the concept note and Adler, C., P. Wester, I. Bhatt, C. Huggel, G.E. Insarov, M.D. Morecroft, V. Muccione, and A. Prakash, 2022: Cross-Chapter Paper 5: Mountains. 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. 2273–2318, doi:10.1017/9781009325844.022.

[12] Mountain Partnership, https://www.fao.org/mountain-partnership/news/news-detail/en/c/1682902

In summary, the topic of mountains could be pursued in UNFCCC processes by integrating mountains into existing negotiations streams. Six negotiation streams have been identified here as potential entry points for discussions on mountains (Adaptation, Agriculture and Technology, Forestry and REDD+, RSO, Loss and Damage and Finance). Some of these were already identified by the dialogue and one of its objectives was precisely identifying a way forward for mountains in these spaces.

Adaptation is without a doubt the most appropriate space to discuss mountains given the place mountains already have in both the Global Goal on Adaptation and the Nairobi Work Programme. Further, given the variety of topics mountains touch upon, it is recommended to address mountains in one negotiation stream to avoid a disparate approach. Thus, it is our opinion that negotiations on adaptation are the most appropriate negotiation stream for discussions on mountains.

3. Other opportunities to discuss these issues

In addition to the dialogue itself and the relevant negotiation streams set above, there are further opportunities to promote Mountains.

The first one, already discussed, is the establishment of Mountains as an agenda item. For some Parties promoting Mountains as an agenda item, the establishment of the Expert Dialogue on mountains and climate change that took place at SB60 was a form of consolation for the lack of agreement to introduce a new agenda item on mountains into UNFCCC processes.

If they so wish, Parties still have the possibility to attempt to include mountains as additional agenda items in the future (Rule 10 of the COP Rules of Procedure). As this is a party-driven process if there is enough support for that operation, they may do so. However, given the reticence expressed at COP 28, and the growing financial and time constraints, it may be wiser to look at other opportunities to discuss mountains as explored above, through existing established agenda items.

Other forms of promoting mountains would be the establishment of a work programme on Mountains or tabling an amendment to either the UNFCCC or the Paris Agreement, both are difficult to achieve.

Treaty modification is very challenging and on the other hand, establishing a work programme is complex and generally established or mandated internally, often by the COP itself. Furthermore, these are usually designed to interpret and implement a Decision and to provide a strategy on how to pursue the Decision. Thus, this would not be appropriate for the subject of mountains as there has not been a Decision on this issue.

Finally, Parties have the possibility to submit comments and submissions to calls for submissions on related topics which would increase the visibility of the topic and establish it as a regular occurrence in discussions.

Below is a list of upcoming calls for submission, mandated at SB60 that could be of relevance to mountains:

- UAE Framework for Global Climate Resilience (GGA):

- Parties were invited to submit via the submission portal,[13] no later than 6 weeks prior to SB 61, their views on matters relating to paragraph 38 Decision 2/CMA.5 on the GGA. This call for submissions could be particularly interesting for mountains, in relation to paragraph 38(a), which requires Parties to consider the "exchange of knowledge, experience and information related to implementing the UAE Framework for Global Climate Resilience'.
- Parties were also invited to submit via the submission portal,[14] before July 31st 2024, information on existing indicators for measuring progress towards targets referred to in paras 9-10 Decision 2/CMA.5 and information on associated methodologies and data readiness for such indicators, as well as identified gaps and areas for which the development of new indicators may be needed.
  This is of particular relevance given that mountains are explicitly mentioned in paragraph 9(d) and relevant elements are also mentioned, such as agriculture and food security (para 9(b)) and water security (para 9(a)).

- Sharm el-Sheikh joint work on implementation of climate action on agriculture and food security:[15] Parties were invited to submitted via the submission portal, before each workshop organised in accordance with Decision 3/CP.27 para. 15(b) on topics agreed by Parties, views on the subject of each workshop, its format and suggested speakers.
  It would be possible for Parties to submit proposals relating to mountain regions and their importance for agriculture and food security.

- Research and Systematic Observation:[16] Parties were invited to submit via the submission portal by the 14th of March 2025, views on possible themes for the 17th meeting of the research dialogue, to be held in conjunction with SBSTA 62 (June 2025).
  This is also particularly relevant given the issues identified by Parties and noted above with research and observation, as well as data gaps relating to mountain regions.

4. Conclusion

Thus, although it may be difficult to introduce discussions on mountains into the UNFCCC process other than through the existing dialogue or existing agenda items, it is possible for Parties to raise awareness of these issues by submitting regular and comprehensive submissions on associated topics and themes. This will have the effect of making the topic more prominent in discussions and therefore, potentially paving the way for a future additional agenda item.

[13] FCCC/SB/2024/L.6 <https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/sb2024_L06E.pdf> para 2.
[14] FCCC/SB/2024/L.6 <https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/sb2024_L06E.pdf> para 9.
[15] FCCC/SB/2024/L.2 <https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/sb2024_L02E.pdf>
[16] FCCC/SBSTA/2024/L.9 <https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/sbsta2024_L09E.pdf?download> para 9.