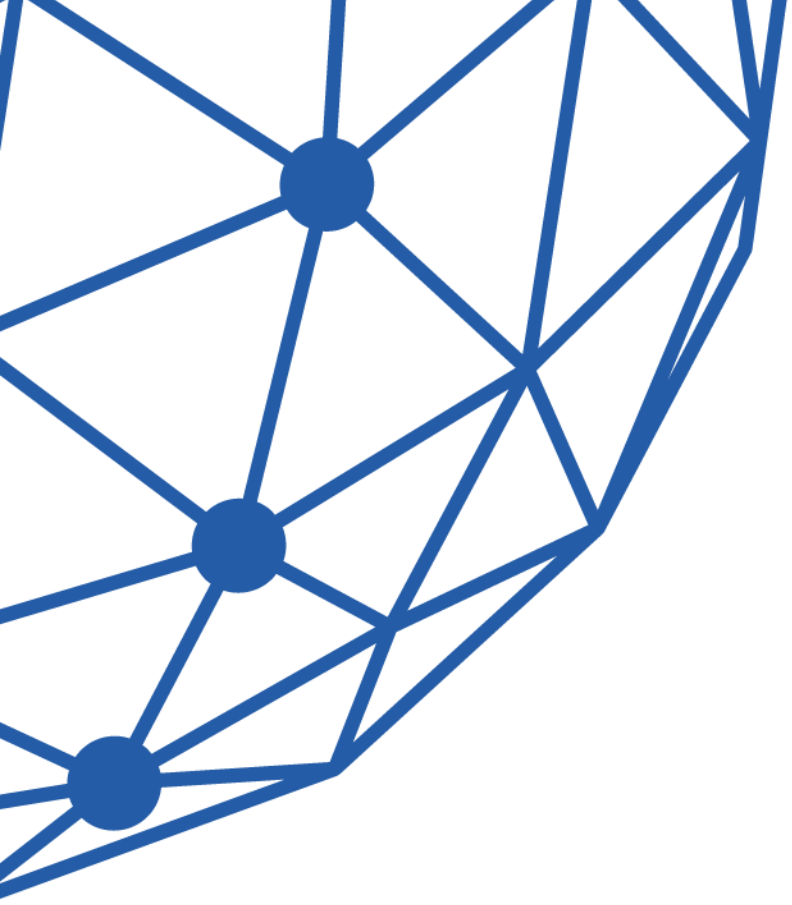

GLOBAL CENTER ON ADAPTATION

ACCELERATING ADAPTATION ACTION: FROM CAS 2021 TO COP26 AND BEYOND

A report on the United Nations General Assembly side event 24th September 2021

Accelerating Adaptation Action: From CAS 2021 to COP26 and Beyond

The event was organised on September 24, 2021, as part of New York Climate Week and as a side event of the United Nations General Assembly 2021, in coordination with the Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management of the Netherlands and the Global Centre on Adaptation (GCA).

Background

As the latest assessment report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in August confirmed, the impacts of climate change are now affecting every region around the world. While accelerating efforts to curb greenhouse gas emissions, the world must also urgently adapt to the changing climate.

This was why the government of the Netherlands, supported by GCA, held the Climate Adaptation Summit (CAS 2021) in January 2021, a dedicated platform of global leaders aimed at firmly placing the world on a pathway to accelerated adaptation and resilience.

This event was a deep dive into the current state of climate adaptation globally, especially on how we make cities and urban spaces more resilient to the impacts of climate change such as flooding. In attendance were experts from around the world.

Speakers at the September 24 event included:

- **Dr Patrick Verkooijen**, CEO, Global Center on Adaptation
- **Mr Henk Ovink**, Special Envoy for International Water Affairs of the Netherlands

- **Mr Kamal Kishore**, Indian Co-Chair of Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI) Executive Committee
- **Dr. Johannes Cullman**, Director, Water and Cryosphere, World Meteorological Organization
- **Dr Vladimir Arana**, Programs Coordinator, International Secretariat for Water
- **Ms Kathleen Dominique**, Programme Lead Financing Water, OECD
- **Dr Hengyi Li**, World Culture Heritage' at the Beijing Institute of Water
- **Dr Mark Kammerbauer**, Nexialist Agency for Research and Communication
- **Ms Nupur Prothi Khanna**, Cultural Landscape Expert, Board Member, International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS)
- **Dr Patrick Moriarty**, CEO of IRC
- **Ms Eden Mati Mwangi**, Country Programme Manager in Kenya, Water & Sanitation for the Urban Poor (WSUP)

CAS 2021 was a key reference point for the event. Why look back at the summit in less than a year? **Event host Ikenna Azuike** explained that this reflected the urgency of working towards climate goals, such as the EU's 2030 Climate Target Plan. The discussions examined the progress made since CAS 2021 with respect to understanding of climate risks, planning and implementation of adaptation measures, and strategies for scaling of promising measures.

Understanding the climate risk

Henk Ovink, Special Envoy for International Water Affairs of the Netherlands, warned that the global community is not moving fast enough with climate adaptation. CAS 2021 was a good springboard for actions, a number of which have been formulated since the summit. However, they need to be accelerated further. This acceleration should lead to improvement of our understanding of the climate risk, increase in commitment, and implementation of actions within a short timeframe.

The difficulty of adaptation, Mr. Ovink explained, is that it is all-pervasive, cross-sectoral, and multi-level. Therefore, it is not one measure or a set of measures, but an overarching endeavor. The limitation of ongoing adaptation projects is that together, they do not add up to much. This points to the need for increasing commitments to adaptation financing. Besides, there is a great need to develop standard processes of implementation, evaluation, and scaling.

So, what has changed since CAS took place in January 2021? According to **Patrick Verkooijen, CEO, GCA**, there has been a greater realization during this period that we are living in the eye of the climate storm. Global climate events—such as forest fires in United States and Europe, floods in Europe and China, and cyclones in South Asia—have been driving that message home. The IPCC 6th Assessment Report confirms that we are locked into a 1.5-degree rise in global temperatures, and thus effectively already living in a climate emergency. Further, UNFCC's synthesis of national climate plans suggests that the best-case scenario they offer is a 2.6-degree temperature rise. Thus, Mr. Verkooijen appealed that the message propagated through COP26 in Glasgow should be that we must focus on adaptation as much as mitigation.

A game changer in this regard, according to Mr. Verkooijen, is the Africa Adaptation Acceleration Program (AAAP). Endorsed by all African governments and set up by the African Development Bank and GCA, the program will invest $25 billion over 5 years in adaptation programs (of which $12.5 billion have already been committed).

In closing, Mr. Verkooijen called for greater urgency in climate adaptation efforts. Adaptation pledges and projects should translate into demonstrable impact on the ground at the frontlines of climate change, within 12 months—smallholder farmers should experience improvements in their livelihoods, there should be an uptick in building of resilient infrastructure, and additional climate adaptation financing streams should emerge. Anything short of that should be counted as failure, he implored.

Do the public opinion and policy priorities share this sense of urgency? According to **Johannes Cullman, Director, Water and Cryosphere, World Meteorological Organization,** while the climate change community expresses sufficient urgency at summits and public platforms, they need to do a better job conveying this to the general public. The media should be made a better ally; the storytelling around climate change needs to be more evocative. A key hurdle to overcome would be the human reflex to appraise a problem in terms of how much it affects their immediate social circles—their friends, their families, their countries etc. In order to generate climate finance in industrialized nations, for investment in countries that are the frontlines, this needs to change.

Picking up the discussion on climate resilient infrastructure, **Mr. Kamal Kishore from Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI)** pointed out that half of the infrastructure the world will have in 2050 is yet to be built. By getting climate-resilient infrastructure right in the coming 5-10 years, the global community would be locking into resilience. If not, it would be locking into risk. To get it right, Mr. Kishore proposed a rethink of current practices in infrastructure development along the following lines:

- Plan infrastructure based on appraisal of long-term needs, rather than responding to assessment of scenarios 5-10 years down the line
- Carry out cross-sectoral risk assessments, rather than working in silos

This approach is reflected in CDRI's framework for assessing infrastructure resilience. There is sufficient traction for such assessment among policymakers, who now demand from experts, concrete solutions that should follow from such assessments.

The economic argument for long-term investment in climate-resilient infrastructure is clear. However, it hasn't proven to be sufficiently compelling. According to **Henk Ovink**, the resistance comes from vested interests who stand to incur short-term losses from paradigm shifts. This needs to be addressed. Besides, greater buy-in should be created among people by convincing them that adaptation goals are actually achievable.

Planning, implementation of adaptation measures in urban areas

Through a panel discussion, participants reflected upon the state of planning and implementation of adaptation measures in urban areas and lessons that can be drawn from them.

Eden Mati Mwangi, Country Programme Manager in Kenya, Water & Sanitation for the Urban Poor (WSUP), argued that an urban community's adaptive capacity was contingent upon access to basic services such as water and sanitation. Thus, city dwellers in developing countries are much more vulnerable to climate change effects than those in developed nations. She also reiterated the need for cross-sector, cross-silo planning and adaptation which better reflects the nature of urban climate challenges.

On the relationship between provision of basic services and climate adaptation, **Patrick Moriarty, CEO, IRC,** cautioned against the view that the two compete for funding. Investment in improving services like water, sanitation, and housing build long-term resilience and adaptive capacity. Unfortunately, climate funds have not yet warmed up to this idea.

Mark Kammerbauer from **Nexialist Agency for Research and Communication** pointed out that while urban residents in developed countries certainly had better access to services, disparities did exist in these societies and the needs of the marginalized were often not taken into consideration by the urban planning process. Besides, cities are not always sufficiently sensitized to the need for adaptive measures and/or endowed with the necessary resources to implement them. Thus, besides developing solutions, there needs to be a change in the culture of planning.

So how does one begin to change the culture of planning? According to **Nupur Prothi Khanna, Cultural Landscape Expert and Board Member, International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS)**, changing current culture might entail embracing the culture of the past. Many societies have a rich history of water and climate-sensitive urban planning, as evident in remnants such as temple tanks in eastern India and aqueducts in southern Europe and the middle east. In many cases, this culture has been lost over the years. It can still offer solutions to current and future challenges, as evident by the Water as Leverage program in Chennai, India, in which traditional urban water management systems were revitalized rather than building new infrastructure. This proved to be effective in building urban water buffers and improving drainage, at a third of the cost of building new infrastructure.

Vladimir Arana, Programs Coordinator, International Secretariat for Water, called for urban adaptation programs to take better into account the capacities and comparative advantages in developing countries. For example, while urban planning capacity is scant in such countries, there are several youth groups whose capacities go unharnessed. Besides, most adaptation plans are implemented through central governments. It would be more efficient to direct resources at citizen organizations and youth groups, as they represent better the interests and problems of the poor and the vulnerable.

Hengyi Li, Doctor of World Culture Heritage' at the Beijing Institute of Water made a brief intervention, highlighting that the city of Beijing had invested in numerous 'green initiatives,' with the aim to significantly improve resilience and livability of the city within a 15-year timeframe.

Given all these insights on and examples of what makes adaptation measures work, who is getting it right? According to **Henk Ovink**, notable examples include the *Adaptation Academy* launched at the Asia-Pacific Climate Week in 2021. Set up by a group of organizations including the Alliance for Global Water Adaptation (AGWA) and UNFCCC, the initiative helps member organizations understand the best practices in adaptation policy and implementation (More information: https://unfccc.int/castt-adaptation-academy). Another example is the *Resilient Water Accelerator*, which supports developing countries to secure vital climate finance for water (More information: https://washmatters.wateraid.org/the-resilient-water-accelerator).

Scaling promising measures

According to **Kathleen Dominique, Programme Lead, Financing Water, OECD**, only a quarter of the global climate finance goals are earmarked for adaptation. This needs to change. Besides, existing investments for adaptation should be used to crowd in other kinds of capital—such as development finance and public money--- in adaptation projects. Acknowledging that financiers do not appreciate the link between investments in development and improvement in adaptive capacity, Ms. Dominique called for pursing new sources of finance and developing innovative financial models in order to make a more compelling financial case for investment in adaptation.

When it comes to developing countries, it is clear what needs to be done towards boosting adaptation. According to **Patrick Moriarty**, it is also clear what the limiting factor is—lack of resources. As much as local governments might understand and appreciate the need to break silos and work in a cross-sectoral manner, they might be too resource-constrained to do put that into practice. Important here is to differentiate between middle income countries and the poorest of the poor. Mr. Moriarty contended that it was the rich countries that created the global climate crisis, and they therefore had an obligation to help lower income countries pay for the measures to withstand it.

Vladimir Arana, Programs Coordinator, International Secretariat for Water added that apart from securing more funds for adaptation, there was need to ensure that they are spent better. This will inevitably involve capacity building of local governments, which often underspend their budgets. It would be worth considering routing some of these funds through local communities instead, who have the best understanding of priorities and potential for impact. Consequently, the planning process should also be devolved and community/youth organizations should be involved more.

Ways Forward

In her vision of the way forward with adaptation, **Hakima El Haité, President, Liberal International, Morocco** recalled the founding principles of UNFCCC which recognised adaptation as being at par with mitigation. They argued that the more we adapt, the less we need to mitigate. Current reality dictates more strongly than ever that we invest equally in the two. She called upon various stakeholders to increase their commitments to adaptation at COP26. Ms. El Haité called for a new deal for adaptation, based on an integrated roadmap that articulates objectives, and technical and financial goals and means to attain them.

According to **Henk Ovink**, a key step towards a climate resilient future would be changing the lock-in into single-focus infrastructure and mechanisms that make it profitable; and working our way towards a more value-based, system-based, river basin-based approach where local communities play a critical role. This will require a roadmap which takes into account all the understanding, commitments, and actions around adaptation globally; as well as steppingstones such as the COP conferences and the 2023 Global Water Summit.