

## Adaptation at Altitude Webinar Series

### Webinar 1: Climate change adaptation in mountain areas: What role is there for parliamentarians?

#### Summary

This first webinar took place on 11 December 2020. It was hosted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the *Adaptation at Altitude* programme of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. The webinar focused on the importance of promoting the sustainable development of mountain regions and the conservation of mountain ecosystems. The hosts were aiming to showcase challenges and opportunities that could help parliaments to play a more active role in the alignment and institutionalization of climate, disaster risk reduction (DRR) and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) targets, as well as to share good practices and discuss their applicability in various political and social contexts. About 100 participants attended the event, including parliamentarians, parliamentary staff, diplomats, practitioners and academic scholars. The webinar was hosted on the Interprefy platform and conducted in English, French and Spanish with simultaneous interpretation in English, French, Spanish and Russian.

As outlined in Kareen Jabre's (Director, Division of Programmes, Inter-Parliamentary Union) introductory remarks, parliaments, given their legislative, budgetary and oversight functions, can ensure the legislative response to climate change is nationally appropriate while also aligned with the Paris Agreement commitments. Furthermore, in mountain areas specifically, they can allocate adequate funding for mountain-specific adaptation actions. To do this effectively, they need to ensure they have a strong understanding of the issues faced by mountain communities and the global challenges at stake. The panellists, Carolina Adler (Executive Director, Mountain Research Initiative), Grammenos Mastrojeni (Deputy Secretary General, Union for the Mediterranean), Nicolas Walder (MP, National Council, Switzerland) and Sebastian Torrealba Alvarado (MP, Chamber of Deputies, Chile), provided insights on these matters in their presentations. The discussion was facilitated by Kareen Jabre and Christian Bréthaut (Assistant Professor, University of Geneva).

In his keynote address, Manfred Kaufmann (Programme Manager, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation) first highlighted the importance of mountain areas and the global frameworks that can help reach sustainable development objectives (e.g. Agenda 2030, the Sendai Framework for DRR, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change). Secondly, he outlined Switzerland's strong commitment to mountain development at the national, regional and global levels. He elaborated on the overarching goals of Swiss development and cooperation, such as strengthening the resilience of communities, improving governance and fostering dialogue and capacity building on adaptation.

Following this, Carolina Adler of *Adaptation at Altitude* presented the key areas the programme is focusing on. She explained why the four outcomes (information and data for monitoring, regional exchange and collaboration, knowledge and sharing, global policy mainstreaming) are interlinked and how they come together to address the question of sustainability and development.

Next, Grammenos Mastrojeni discussed the cascading effects and related geostrategic implications of environmental changes. He suggested that in areas where a fragile ecosystem overlaps with a fragile society such as in mountainous regions, climate change may threaten

development and international stability. This was illustrated by the thawing of Himalayan glaciers, which is a risk for global security in the countries south of the Mountain range, together with climate-related migration.

Nicolas Walder of Switzerland explained that parliamentarians need a clear understanding of the perception of populations impacted differently by climate change (e.g. urban vs rural), drawing on foreseeable economic losses incurred by various sectors (e.g. tourism or agriculture). He elaborated on how Members of Parliament (MPs) can contribute to bridging the gap between scientists and citizens, providing people with the most up-to-date information and meeting their expectations with regionally-relevant responses. He also stressed that transnational cooperation is critical to the successful implementation of mountain adaptation policies.

The final panellist, Sebastián Torrealba of Chile, considered mountains as an asset, not only for the natural resources they provide (e.g. water) but also for their cultural and social aspects, which are of paramount importance for the identity of local populations. He discussed the trade-off between economic activities and protection of the environment in the case of Chile, whose economy is highly dependent on mining operations. Finally, he raised the issue of property rights and unequal access to mountains for different social groups, with the richest often being the main beneficiaries of ecosystems.

Following these stimulating presentations, the audience participated extensively in a virtual Q&A session. Parliamentarians from Rwanda, Suriname and Bahrain asked, among other issues, about the impact of climate change on hydropower generation, the economic activities compatible with the protection of the environment and the most impacted mountain ecosystem to date. The panellists also responded to several pertinent questions from the UN Permanent Representative of Mongolia and various academic scholars.

This webinar was a catalyst for further exchanges on climate change adaptation in mountain areas. Addressing the climate emergency is high on the agenda of IPU Member Parliaments and parliamentarians are increasingly engaged and sensitive to the urgent need for action. The collaboration with the Adaptation at Altitude programme will continue to be strengthened in the coming months so that parliaments can help ensure the sustainable future of mountains, their inhabitants and the planet.