

ADAPTATION FUTURES 2023: THE OPPORTUNITY TO RETHINK CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION TOGETHER

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Once viewed as a remote, distant, and abstract environmental issue because it was too global, climate change has become a continuously topical issue and is described as a global emergency with increasingly present and worrisome economic and human consequences. The latest reports from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and news reports from around the world make it clear that the impacts are being felt on all continents, as well as at the country, regional, local, and even individual levels—with people now regularly affected by major or minor flooding, increasingly unbearable heatwaves, destructive forest fires, and record droughts, to name only a few of the meteorological extremes aggravated by these anthropogenic climate changes. Aside from the coverage of these high-profile impacts, science has long been aware (and society, more recently), that gradual changes are contributing to a subtle but significant degradation of our natural and built environments, which are not optimized for our new climatic reality, contributing to increased collective and individual vulnerability.

Despite these alarming facts, the twofold solution to climate change is fortunately well known: 1) reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions to achieve carbon neutrality as soon as possible, and 2) learn to live with residual climate change, i.e., adapt. In addition to being well known, these two solution categories have the advantage of requiring implementation planet-wide, offering a fantastic opportunity for collaboration on a global scale, so that we can share our experiences and innovate in the most effective way possible. In this context, it becomes crucial that, at regular intervals, we take stock of our scientific and practical knowledge, exchange views on our experiences and their applicability, and improve our ways of doing things in order to increase the scope and speed of the fight against climate change.



The Conference Series That Brings Together the Global Community of Adaptation Science and Practice

In the field of climate change adaptation, the Adaptation Futures conference series, managed by the World Adaptation Science Program (WASP), under the aegis of the United Nations Environment Program, is the international conference that brings together the global adaptation science and practice community. Since its first edition, held in Australia, this conference, which has been held every two years since 2010 (Figure 1), has gathered major adaptation projects and networks to discuss their activities, results, outputs, and impacts. It has also facilitated communication of the best available scientific data, best practices, and lessons learned, and it has provided an opportunity for key parties, including decision-makers at the local, regional, and global levels—both public and private—to meet, exchange ideas, and establish collaborations and partnerships.

At each event, a special effort is made to build the capacities of participants starting their career, particularly those from developing countries, who, as we know, are most at risk from climate change while having contributed very little to the problem. Both the event's steering and scientific committees also seek to prioritize emerging themes, to help accelerate progress in developing effective adaptation strategies.

From October 2 to 6, 2023, Canada Hosts the 7th Edition in Montréal

As early as 2017, and then on the sidelines of the Adaptation Futures 2018 conference in Cape Town, Ouranos and the Government of Canada discussed submitting Canada's candidacy to host the edition then scheduled

for 2022. As part of an international competitive process, Ouranos submitted its bid in early 2019, and learned at the end of the same year that this bid, strongly supported by the Government of Canada, was the winning proposal, and that the announcement would be made at the close of the next Adaptation Futures conference, scheduled to take place in New Delhi, India in April 2020.

The India conference ended up being rescheduled to October 2021 and taking place only virtually and at a smaller scale than in the past. For the Canadian organizers, the pandemic prompted a review of several aspects, including the format. Indeed, the sudden and massive emergence of telecommuting, as well as the development of technological tools enabling virtual gatherings, offered the opportunity to address the issue of thousands of people travelling to the conference and emitting tons of GHGs—what some have called climate hypocrisy. As direct human contact remains crucial in some cases, particularly for young people looking for mentors to start their career in the field, it was quickly decided that Canada's Adaptation Futures edition, now rescheduled to October 2023, would be a hybrid event, targeting around 1,500 people onsite and the highest number of participants online. This approach will enable us to develop a more equitable, inclusive, and sustainable conference, using the most effective tools and approaches developed worldwide during the pandemic, to ensure impactful sessions despite the combination of onsite and virtual participants.

International-calibre advisory and scientific committees, meeting a variety of diversity criteria and including at least one Indigenous representative, have enabled the development of a program that will accelerate the global momentum in favour of adaptation. To this end, the committees also agreed that it was preferable to prioritize certain aspects, i.e., issues that will ramp up significantly in the short term and solution elements that urgently need to take off in order to reduce climate change impact risks. As a result, four specific cross-cutting objectives quickly emerged:

1. Learn from **Indigenous** and local knowledge and perspectives on climate change adaptation research, policy, practice, and action;

2. Encourage faster adoption of **transformative adaptation** to ensure long-term resilience;
3. Bring marginalized voices to the fore, particularly those from the South, as part of an approach based on **justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion** in the face of climate change;
4. **Accelerate progress** on the Global Goal on Adaptation and the Global Stocktake, and step up action to implement effective adaptation.

Acknowledging these objectives, and conscious of our community's responsibility to "walk the talk," the committees and organizers will seek to pursue these goals by developing a conference that uses more equitable, inclusive, and low-carbon means.

In addition, the committees felt that a number of specific themes were an absolute priority for the future of adaptation. Based in particular on the latest report from IPCC Working Group 2, the conference's scientific committee circulated (notably via social networks) a list of potential priority themes, ahead of the call for contributions, which was to take place in fall 2022. This collaborative and inclusive approach enabled feedback from the global adaptation community on the themes for the abstracts/sessions. Eight priority themes emerged.

Eight Themes Identified as Priorities for the Future of Adaptation

The eight priority themes are not sector-based, thereby recognizing the importance of thinking in a more integrated way and hopefully fostering better integration of adaptation solutions in a complex world.

Indeed, adaptation solutions for agriculture have implications for natural ecosystems, social cohesion, population health, natural resource and infrastructure planning, as well as regional and national economic development. The eight themes are based on major questions that Adaptation Futures 2023 will attempt to answer:

1. Learn from Indigenous and local knowledge and know-how on adaptation

Indigenous peoples have looked after the land, water, and ocean for generations, anticipating and responding to climate variability and change. How can we integrate Indigenous knowledge and the experiences of other knowledge holders to ensure long-term resilience?

2. Managing multiple risks: Composite, cascading, and cross-border risks associated with climate change

Populations face many simultaneous challenges, and climate change is just one stress factor. How can we take into account the complexity of the situation and the interactions between the multiple vectors of climate change and vulnerabilities when defining and implementing the necessary measures?

3. Making adaptation choices: Managing compromises and striving for efficiency

It is essential to integrate perspectives to promote adaptation choices that value diversity and limit maladaptation. How can we make an integrated assessment of systemic and transformational adaptation and maintain long-term resilience?

4. When adaptation is no longer possible

Adaptation (and mitigation) efforts will not be enough to meet the complexity of all climate risks and vulnerabilities. So, what should we do when our adaptive capacity is no longer enough to face climate challenges and to achieve the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals?

5. Who loses, who wins, and who decides?

Fairness and justice in the face of adaptation

The effects of climate change disproportionately affect marginalized and vulnerable groups. Efforts to support adaptation must therefore address fundamental issues of ethics, equity, and justice.

6. The power of nature in climate action

Human and natural systems are deeply interconnected. More must be done to analyze the climate-nature-society connection and understand the potential of nature-based approaches to adaptation.

7. Teaching and learning to adapt in a changing climate

Education systems must ensure effective learning about adaptation, in a world where, for many, climate change is a reality. How can teaching and learning inspire hope, embrace knowledge plurality, and nuance the realities (and suffering) associated with the climate crisis?

8. Inclusive adaptation of governance and finance: How do we get there?

Adequate governance mechanisms, effective and inclusive decision-making processes, and a favourable institutional and financial environment are essential to build, accelerate, and sustain climate-resilient development. How can this be achieved?

Furthermore, recognizing participants' declining interest in traditional scientific sessions, where communication is essentially unidirectional and involves detailed presentation of results and methodologies, the conference will give preference to interactive panels, discussion workshops, and other dynamic approaches that maximize the presence of a large community, while leaving specific details and results to be accessible in articles and reports.

The Many Challenges and Opportunities of Adaptation

Organizing an international conference for an issue as diverse and global as adaptation to climate change is no easy task. For example, although the eight priority themes were identified with the participation of adaptation leaders, a significant proportion of the papers and sessions received in the call for papers were aligned around the thematic and organizational silos

of adaptation players. What's more, despite the desire of developed countries to help the most vulnerable to adapt, visa processes and the prohibitive costs of even hybrid conferences point to a multitude of obstacles to the development of global adaptive capacity. Despite these minor challenges, it's a safe bet that, for the many organizers and partners involved, as well as for the participants representing over a hundred countries, the actions that will result from the meetings will be compatible with the conference slogan, "**Time to innovate: Adapting Together.**" Indeed, beyond the small barriers to adaptation, it is above all the political will of individuals, organizations, decision-makers, and politicians to innovate collaboratively that will enable us to meet the challenge of adaptation in the most effective way possible.



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Adaptation