NR22 / Multi-Level Governance and Adaptation Pathways: Cross-Scale Insights from India

Topic : Research

Chair : Sony R K (Sustainable Futures Collaborative)

Second Chair : Sarada Das (Sustainable Futures Collaborative)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

Climate adaptation has become a complex governance challenge due to the dynamic nature and impacts of climate hazards and the multiple levels of government involved. Research on multi-level governance (Allen et al. 2023; Jörgensen et al. 2015; Ishtiaque 2021) and polycentric governance (Ostrom 2010) shows how decision-making spans different levels, including local, subnational, national, and global institutions, and how the proliferation of overlapping authorities makes coordination among actors an important aspect of action. Adaptive governance research further demonstrates the importance of flexibility, collaboration and decision-making that involves multiple actors at multiple levels (Folke et al. 2005; Walch 2019). On the other hand, literature on climate governance in India has highlighted the “top-heavy nature of Indian federalism” as a challenge to the way climate issues are handled, as the impacts are felt at the local level (Pillai and Dubash 2023). While this literature provides strong conceptual foundations, empirical research on adaptation, particularly from developing countries such as India, remains focused on single governance levels. Additionally, research on adaptation governance in India has a sectoral focus without bringing these sectors into conversation. Bringing such a cross-sectoral focus to research is important to identify broader patterns in how multi-level and adaptive governance influences adaptation planning and outcomes.

This panel attempts to address this gap by viewing climate adaptation as an inherently cross-scale governance process shaped by institutions at multiple levels. To this end, the broad questions this panel put forth are:

1) How do multi-level governance structures enable or constrain effective adaptation in critical sectors such as heat governance, energy resilience, coastal adaptation, and wildfire management?

2) What innovations help bridge actions across sectors to bring out effective adaptation?

These questions are significant in the context of increased climate impacts and the complexity involved in adaptation governance. For instance, India’s coastline faces multiple hazards (sea-level rise, cyclones, erosion), where national and subnational planning and local constraints play an important role in its governance. Cities facing extreme heat depend on local (municipal) planning, along with subnational health authorities and national guidance. Similarly, rising climate pressures are increasingly straining energy systems, as extreme weather events disrupt electricity supplies and impede reliable energy access. Wildfire governance involves landowners living in the forest fringes, conservation groups, national and subnational forest authorities, showing the inherent multi-level character of adaptation decision making. These examples also highlight the need to take a deeper look at multi-level governance to better understand how well-recognised adaptation barriers, such as limited cross-sector coordination, misaligned responsibilities, and capacity gaps, operate in local and regional contexts.

The panel welcomes conceptual and empirical contributions that advance our understanding of adaptation governance in various sectors, including (but not limited to) heat, energy, coast, and forest, through multilevel and polycentric perspectives and case studies that unpack the impact of multi-level governance on adaptation action. The panel will contribute to a better understanding of how multi-level governance shapes adaptation trajectories in the context of multiple climate hazards and associated risks.

References

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Social-Ecological Systems'. Annual Review of Environment and Resources 30 (1): 441–73. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.energy.30.050504.144511.

3. Ishtiaque, Asif. 2021. Multilevel Governance in Climate Change Adaptation: Conceptual Clarification and Future Outlook. https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-822700-8.00009-3.

4. Jörgensen, Kirsten, Arabinda Mishra, and Gopal K. Sarangi. 2015. 'Multi-Level Climate Governance in India: The Role of the States in Climate Action Planning and Renewable Energies'. Journal of Integrative Environmental Sciences 12 (4): 267–83. https://doi.org/10.1080/1943815X.2015.1093507.

5. Ostrom, Elinor. 2010. 'Polycentric Systems for Coping with Collective Action and Global Environmental Change'. Global Environmental Change 20 (4): 550–57. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2010.07.004.

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7. Walch, Colin. 2019. 'Adaptive Governance in the Developing World: Disaster Risk Reduction in the State of Odisha, India'. Climate and Development 11 (3): 238–52. https://doi.org/10.1080/17565529.2018.1442794.

CALL FOR PAPERS

Multi-Level Governance and Adaptation Pathways: Cross-Scale Insights from India

Climate adaptation has become a complex governance challenge due to the dynamic nature and impacts of climate hazards and the multiple levels of government involved. Research on multi-level governance and polycentric governance shows how decision-making spans different levels, including local, subnational, national, and global institutions, and how the proliferation of overlapping authorities makes coordination among actors an important aspect of action. Adaptive governance research further demonstrates the importance of flexibility, collaboration and decision-making that involves multiple actors at multiple levels. On the other hand, literature on climate governance in India has highlighted the "top-heavy nature of Indian federalism" as a challenge to the way climate issues are handled, as the impacts are felt at the local level. While this literature provides strong conceptual foundations, empirical research on adaptation, particularly from developing countries such as India, remains focused on single governance levels. Additionally, research on adaptation governance in India has a sectoral focus without bringing these sectors into conversation. Bringing such a cross-sectoral focus to research is important to identify broader patterns in how multi-level and adaptive governance influences adaptation planning and outcomes.

This panel seeks papers that explore how multi-level governance arrangements shape adaptation decision-making, implementation, and outcomes across diverse sectors. We are particularly interested in contributions that examine cross-scale interactions, governance innovations, and the ways institutional structures enable or constrain effective adaptation.

Key Questions:

1) How do multi-level governance structures influence adaptation in sectors such as heat governance, energy resilience, coastal adaptation, and wildfire management?

2) What mechanisms, innovations, or practices help bridge actions across governance scales and sectors?

3) How do coordination gaps, capacity constraints, or misaligned responsibilities manifest at local and regional levels?

We welcome conceptual and empirical contributions that advance our understanding of adaptation governance in various sectors, including (but not limited to) heat, energy, coast, and forest, through multilevel and polycentric perspectives and case studies that unpack the impact of multi-level governance on adaptation action. This panel aims to foster a cross-sectoral conversation that brings together insights from heat, energy, coastal, forest, and other adaptation domains to better understand how multi-level governance structures shape adaptation pathways in a rapidly changing climate.

Submission Guidelines:

Please submit abstracts with the following details

1) Abstract length: 250–300 words, 2) Include title, author(s), affiliation(s), contact information and three-five keywords

We look forward to your submissions.