

Special Issue

The Third Pole in Peril: Climate Change, Water Security, and Sustainable Futures in the Hindu Kush Himalaya

Message from the Guest Editor

Often referred to as the “Third Pole” due to its vast reserve of ice and snow, the Hindu Kush Himalaya (HKH) region holds the largest concentration of glaciers outside polar areas. However, the HKH is warming at a rate faster than the global average, triggering rapid glacial retreat, permafrost degradation, and seasonal shifts in precipitation. These changes pose escalating risks to water security, alpine biodiversity, agricultural productivity, and climate resilience across densely populated and ecologically sensitive downstream regions.

Beyond its physical significance, the Third Pole is intricately tied to cultural identities, traditional livelihoods, and sustainable development trajectories in South and Central Asia. As indigenous communities and fragile mountain ecosystems face mounting socio-environmental stressors, there is an urgent need for interdisciplinary, localized, and justice-oriented approaches to climate adaptation and resilience. Understanding the interlinkages between high-altitude ecology, water governance, transboundary cooperation, and socio-economic transformation is vital to safeguarding the long-term sustainability of this region.

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