

# Chapter 2: Drivers of Change to Mountain Sustainability

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## Introduction

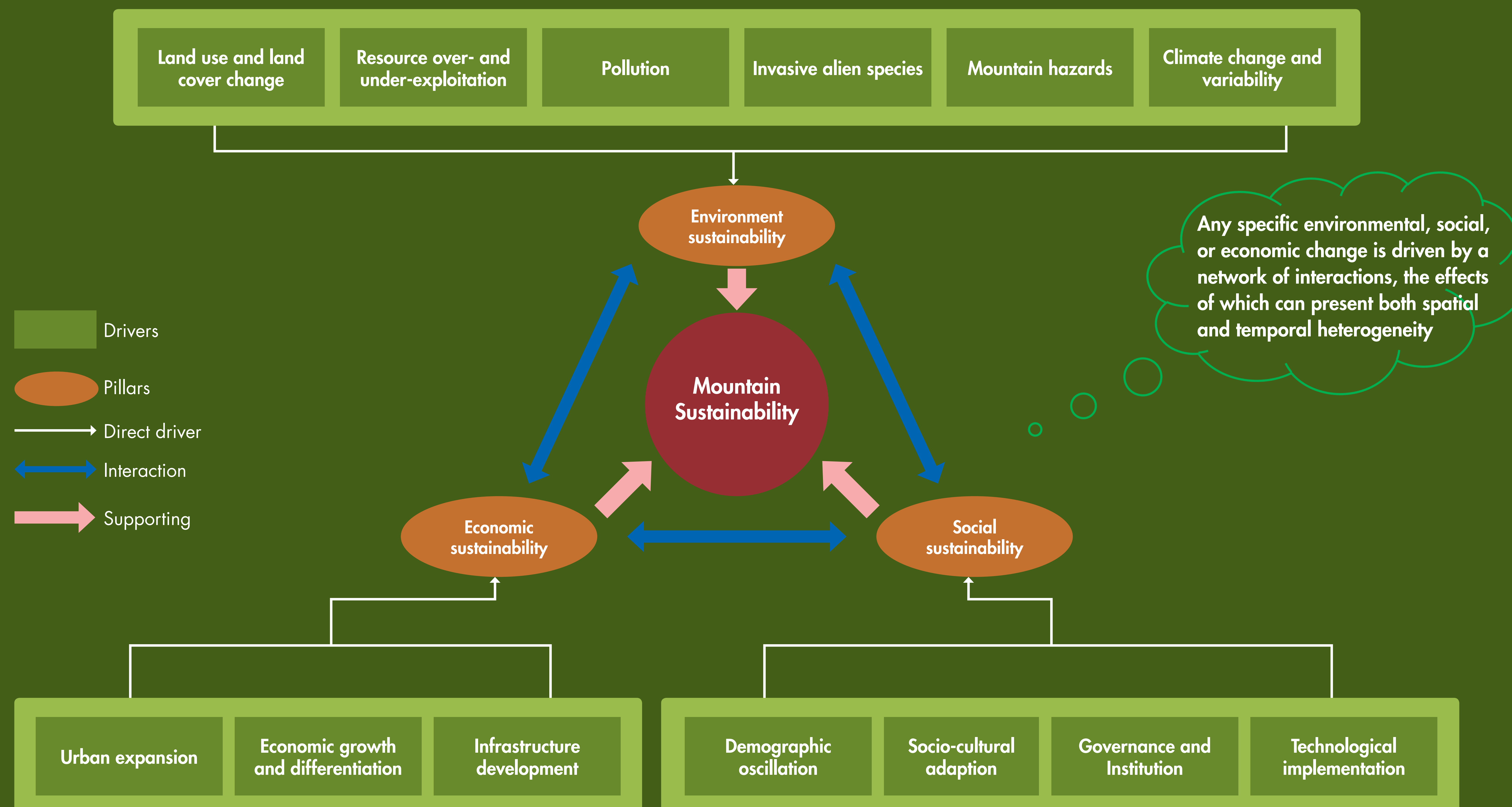
What is driving changes to the sustainability of mountain communities in the Hindu Kush Himalaya (HKH)? This chapter seeks answers to this question. Divided into three main sections, it documents the evidence on three types of change—environmental, social, and economic—that reflect the three pillars of sustainability defined by Agenda 21 of the United Nations. As each section explores one of these types of change to sustainability, it describes trends, identifies existing and potential impacts, and relates the change to a varied and often complicated set of drivers.

## Key Messages

1. Environmental, social, and economic changes in the HKH are closely linked, and all are increasingly driven by regional and global developments.
2. Environmental, social, and economic changes over the last three decades in the HKH have created looming challenges.
3. For mountain societies in the HKH, certain changes may bring new opportunities for sustainable development.

## Policy Messages

1. To meet the challenges of environmental, social, and economic change in the HKH, policy approaches must become more holistic and multidimensional.
2. These challenges cannot be addressed without strong, timely government interventions.
3. Regional governments should accelerate and combine their efforts, especially with a view to benefit from the global agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals for 2030.



Changes to sustainability in the HKH are attracting increased attention, in part because the HKH have begun to receive worldwide recognition as a discrete and important region.

Generally, this region faces enormous pressures from both global and regional change, but it is especially affected by combinations of natural drivers and anthropogenic forces.

Rapid demographic and economic growth have increased the demand for natural resources, leading to significant land use and land cover (LULC) change, overexploitation, habitat fragmentation, and unsustainable socioeconomic activities. Continuing demographic polarization, with people increasingly concentrated in cities, is expected to create future challenges through environmental impacts and the growing demand for food and energy. Technology has markedly affected ways of life, consumption patterns, and indigenous sociocultural practices; it has also brought new development opportunities to people in remote areas. Three major drivers—climate change, invasive alien species, and weak governance—are negatively impacting sustainable development. Thus, as countries in the HKH work to adapt and to mitigate these impacts or stresses, all their efforts need to involve closer regional and international collaboration than ever before.