

CLIMATE MATTERS

India's Climate Change Policy and Climate Justice: An Overview



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Introduction

Climate change has become a global threat driven by both nature and anthropogenic activities like fossil fuel burning, industrial activities, deforestation, releasing greenhouse gases like CO₂ and methane. The global impact of climate change is far reaching and multifaceted, especially the increase in global temperature. According to the report by Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2021), average global temperature has increased by 1.1 degree celsius due to human activities. These trends can be witnessed in the form of severe weather events such as heatwaves, droughts, hurricanes, sea level rise, melting of glaciers etc. This could possibly threaten the coastal communities and ecosystem, ocean acidification due to increased CO₂ absorption. Biodiversity loss is another major impact of climate change and this could have the risk of extinction of species if the temperature rises by 2-degree pre-industrial level. Highlighting on India, it is vulnerable to climate change due to geographical diversity, dependence on agriculture and population density. It has already been experiencing the brunt of climate change in the form of heatwave and health hazards associated with it, altered monsoon patterns, rising sea level and sea erosion, and impact on agricultural output and food security among others.

The need for strong climate policy has become more important than ever as the globe comes to terms with climate change and climate justice. Most of the climate policies evade the concern of climate justice in the domestic arena while formulating climate policies. At the International negotiations on climate change, developing countries/global south prioritises economic development over climate concerns in the pretext of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities.

India's role in combating Climate Change

Given the vulnerability of climate change, India, through its domestic policies have taken certain environmental action like protecting regional glaciers, greening the railway station, emphasising on clean cooking fuel, etc. (Choudhary 2022). India, over the time has developed its policy response through various programmes to reduce emission and adapting to sustainability. Some of the major initiatives taken by India at the domestic level to reduce emissions and towards sustainability. Some of them are:

1. Renewable energy initiatives- substantial investments in renewable energy have been made so that the dependence on fossil fuels are reduced to decrease emission of greenhouse gases. Achieving 450 GW capacity of renewable energy by 2030 is the aim, focussing more on solar and wind power (Ministry of New and Renewable Energy, 2020).
2. In 2008, the National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC), was launched and it states the country's strategy to tackle climate change. The NAPCC consists of several programmes highlighting different areas of climate change like solar energy, sustainable agriculture, conserving water, and ecosystem protection.

At the global level, India is committed to several global climate negotiations and several agreements. It has updated its Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) for the achievement of the Paris Agreement to reach net Zero by 2070. India's first NDC was surfaced in CoP 21- Paris agreement (2015) wherein India released its "Nationally Determined Contribution- working towards Climate Justice" (PIB 2016) which comprised two important targets that can be quantified. Those were: "to reduce emissions of its Gross Domestic Product to 35 percent from 33 percent by 2030; and to achieve around 40 percent electric power

capacity from non-fossil fuel energy resources by 2030" (Press Information Bureau 2023).

Presenting the concerns of the developing countries at the CoP 26, held in Glasgow, 2021, India presented 'Panchamrit'- 5 nectar elements (Press Information Bureau 2022) which are: to raise 500 GW electricity generation capacity using non-fossil fuel, to achieve its energy requirements 50 percent from renewable energy, reducing carbon emissions by one billion metric tons, and to reduce the intensity of carbon emission approximately by 45 percent- all by 2030, and to achieve a net-zero target by 2070. Focus was also made on "LIFE- Lifestyle for Environment to combat climate change" emphasising on the efficient and mindful utilisation of resources over destructive consumption (Press Information Bureau 2022).

At the 27th Conferences of Parties, India repeated all of the commitments made in CoP 26 (Dev and Kohli 2022). The document also stressed on "Mission LiFE " emphasising on sustainable lifestyle (Dev and Kohli 2022). The goal of achieving net-zero by 2070 that it had announced in Glasgow was formally stated by India in its national statement (Dev and Kohli 2022).

India at COP 28, held in Dubai, 2023 unveiled the Green Credit Initiative and pitched for world's countries to join this initiative that caters for non-commercial effort to reduce emission (Koshy 2023).

India, now topping the list of the world's largest population (UN 2023) and an economy predicted to be 7 trillion dollars by 2030 (D'Souza, Shenoy and Nair 2023), the country would be needing more resources which would also raise its carbon footprint. The prediction is that India would consume more energy with an increase of 30 percent by 2030 and by 2050, it would increase by 90 percent (International Energy Agency 2023). Given this prediction data, how would India attain its ambitious NDC target is the real test for it to carry carbon sink mechanisms and work towards net zero.

India's Climate Policy in Vain

India is viewed as a voice for developing countries, therefore, it has a responsibility to mitigate and push the developed nations to speed up effort towards climate action (Roy 2022). However, it also has a responsibility towards its own country to act for climate resilience and sustainability. When it comes to policy, the economy and growth aspect of climate action is given precedence over development and sustainability and moreover, over climate justice.

There is hardly any comprehensive policy-roadmap at domestic level to achieve the commitments made at various CoPs. With a claim that India is making progress towards commitments made in its NDC announcement in 2016 (Deb and Kohli 2022), it is uncertain on how India has addressed climate justice. Large scale displacement has been witnessed due to sea level rise, land and forest vulnerability due to non-renewable energy generation, crop failure due to altered monsoon patterns, deaths and droughts, and many more. The effects of climate change are felt by those who normally do not contribute to it. Hence, the question of climate justice needs to be taken seriously when making any mitigation efforts and formulating climate policies. Any climate policies- international or domestic must take into consideration the issue of carbon injustice by making the richer countries take responsibility and contribute more towards technology transfer to the vulnerable countries and commit to emitting low carbon. Domestically, there has to be a clearly defined policy that works towards climate resilience prioritising climate justice.

India, at the domestic level has tried to formulate and implement multiple climate related policies however, it is in vain with no proper implementation strategy. The policies have failed to address the most critical issue of phasing out fossil fuel despite prioritising transition to renewable energy. It has been witnessed that the normative aspect of climate change mitigation has been ignored- in order to internalise the cost, it is required that those who emit greenhouse gases should also pay the social and environmental costs of it; working towards climate justice requires that those who are harmed due to climate change and the transition efforts, needs to be compensated (Kalaiyarasan and Sahu 2023). Though at the international level, these negotiations are well articulated, they often falter at the domestic level especially in the developing countries which prioritises economic growth over climate negotiations. Hence, it is essential that these policies related to climate action vis-a-vis climate justice are given utmost importance and materialise even at the domestic level.

Conclusion

India's historically lower emission has led it to focus on economic growth over climate issues. However, India should focus more on alternative ways of prioritising climate concerns along with economic growth and development. Since energy use constitutes 75% of GHG emission, industrial waste and agriculture, targets on emission intensity that India have committed could have been more goal driven towards climate action and climate justice. Regulating fossil fuel is a must to shift towards green energy and to also help India achieve its goal of renewable energy conversion. Government should make collaborative efforts with local communities (and vice-versa) for sustainable management of forests which act as natural carbon sinks. Most importantly as Sharma (2023) also highlights that in order for sustainable climate policy, financial, political, and policy leadership are mandatory and also effective climate policy for India. Government should consider collaborating with carbon footprinting companies or climate technology to design and plan implementing green policies. An inclusive policy involving regional, state, national and international efforts are imperative not only for India but also for all other countries to build a climate resilient earth sustainable future.

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