

Critical Analysis on “India’s Position and Stand on Distributive Climate Justice”

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Abstract: *Through this paper the author aims to critically examine India’s stand on distributive climate justice, especially in the context of COP26 held in Glasgow. The divergences between the developed and developing nations were clearly visible during the negotiations in the conference. The paper starts with explaining the concept of distributive justice and how it came to be used in the context of tackling climate change. The next section talks about important issues advocated by India in the conference such as phasing down of coal rather than phasing out and climatic finance. Then, the focus shifts on challenge faced by India dealing with the balancing of meeting international commitments and national interest. Further, an important aspect about how India will be able to meet its commitments of COP26 at both the international and domestic fronts becomes important to mention. The various challenges faced by the country in implementing its Climate change policy such as the lack of financing and transmission problems have been highlighted. The paper ends with giving some insights into the unique position of India and how it can emerge as a ‘VISWAGURU’ on tackling climate change.*

Keywords: Climate change, COP26, historical emissions, nationally determined commitments (NDCs), climate finance

1. Introduction

Distributive Climate Justice

The concept of justice started to emerge in climate change initially in the context of taking responsibilities for reductions in emissions of greenhouse gases. This could have a historical connotation based on the countries’ historical emissions, their capacity to bear mitigation cost, as well as the future forecasts of these emissions. But the recent debates on climate issues have broadened the concept of justice to include:

- How to measure the success of climate change adaptation techniques and technologies
- Climatic finance and resources
- Settling the trade-offs between mitigation as well as adaptation [1]

Distributive justice aims to ensure that distribution of risks and benefits takes place in a fair and just manner. As far as the climate change is concerned, it has the potential to cause significant implications for international equality. This is because there is an unequal distribution of the causes and consequences of climate change both between and within the nations. [2] This also gives rise to an ethical problem as the countries that bear the least responsibility for climatic change also have the lowest social and economic capacity for coping with the costs associated with climate change. Therefore, the challenge lies in not only deciding as to what is unequal and unjust in the distribution of detrimental effects of climate change but also on terms of how is the benefits of climate change causing actions are distributed. [3]

As far as India’s policy toward tackling climate change is concerned, there are both domestic and dimensions to it, being articulated through National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC) and India’s Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). NAPCC presents a holistic awareness on climate change through several inter-related areas such as: agriculture, water, industry, energy, urban

spaces as well as the mountain environment. The climate change policy of India acknowledges the fact that climate change and ensuring energy security are two sides of the same coin. [4]

COP26: What did India vouch for?

COP holds an opportunity for the nations to come together for discussing the measures for tackling the climate change, especially by reducing anthropomorphic global warming. The Glasgow Pact had been adopted by 197 parties on 13 November, 2021. India’s climatic action after the COP26 consists of the five elements (Panchamrit) which includes targets for building non-fossil energy capacity and renewable energy; and reducing the total projected carbon emissions up to a certain limit by 2030; and most importantly achieving the target of net-zero emissions by 2070. [5]

India had adopted a unique position on different matters discussed at the conference.

Phase down of coal rather than phase out: India along with China had shown stern opposition to the commitment of complete phase out of coal, rather they agreed to ‘phase down’ coal. India along with other developing countries had argued that on one hand, they are being put under pressure to switch from fossil fuels to renewables, but on the other hand, the developed countries are not supporting them either financially or with technology [6]. This intervention by India had caused tensions among developed countries and some developing countries also. Despite this deep disappointment of developed nations, experts say that this has helped India to come out of the good boy syndrome by taking a stand for itself and other developing countries. Also, India’s per capita emissions of CO₂ are much lower than the global average. [7] There is no cheaper alternative technology.

Cooperation among the Like-Minded developing countries (LMDC) and hike in climatic finance: At the ministerial meeting of the LMDC countries, India asserted that the climatic finance needs a hike from the 2009 levels

and must be at least USD I Trillion. It highlighted the responsibility of the developed countries to provide support to the developing countries in terms of:

- Climatic finance
- Technology transfers
- And capacity building

As well as their empty promises and inability to deliver USD 100 Billion per year by 2020. Also, it pointed out the need to have a system to monitor climatic finance. [8]

Mantra of LIFE: 'LIFESTYLE FOR ENVIRONMENT' as a key component to combat climatic change. There is a need to have a mass movement on Environment conscious lifestyles. India conveyed the message that what is needed today is mindful and responsible utilization and not mindless consumption. [9]

Finally calling a spade 'a spade': and bringing to forth the much known fact of historical responsibilities of developed nations including USA and Europe. It had called on the developed countries to undertake rapid reductions in emissions so that they reach the net zero targets much earlier as they historically bear more burden of emissions. [10]

Balance between National Interest and International Responsibility

Even though the climatic change is pertinent to address, but the inequities existing between different countries in their capability to address climatic change cannot be ignored. The developing countries, particularly India faces certain disadvantages owing to the following to the factors:

- Increasing population
- Increasing energy requirements with not much increase in energy generation
- Poverty
- Most of the population living in rural areas

On a comparative analysis with the developed nations such as US, it could be found out that India has sound reasons for having a tilt towards its national interests than being always obedient to meet the international obligations. Even though India is third largest carbon emitter, it has marginal historical responsibility for climatic action when compared to developed countries. Also, India's percentage emissions need to be seen in the background of development trajectories of several countries. On this note, the absolute emissions of both US and China are high. [11] A further greater disparity is apparent when we look at India's per capita emissions which are about 10-12 times lower than US. India's capacity to make commitments for mitigation is hindered by its low per capita GDP and high poverty levels. [12] The crux is that India faces multifold challenges in balancing its national interests and international responsibilities and it needs to find the middle path.

India's updated Nationally determined Contributions (NDCs) has set higher targets as compared to the 2015 NDC goals in the terms of reduction in emissions intensity of its GDP and increased power generation from no-fossil fuel

based energy resources by 2030. The updated NDC represents multiple things for India. It showcases India's heightened commitment for decoupling the economic growth from greenhouse gas emissions and endeavoring towards the achievement of sustainable development goals (SDGs) through this. Further, it captures the citizen-centric approach to tackle climatic change through the LIFE Movement which propagates a lifestyle that is essential for saving the planet and not deteriorating it. It paves a path for India to transition from fossil fuels to cleaner energy in 2021-2030. [13]

It is important to highlight how India will be able to meet its target of net zero by 2070 through its NDCs, it can happen through two ways: the programs and policies at domestic level and the international initiatives heralded by India.

A) Steps at Domestic Level:

The National Action Plan on Climatic Change (NAPCC) India had already over-achieved its commitments under the previously set NDC and it also appears on the right track for meeting its updated NDC target. The renewable energy programme of India is expected to grow with the help of Production linked incentive initiated with the purpose of expanding the domestic production of solar panels. Also, the energy efficiency programs being brought up by the government are focused over different sectors of the economy. For e. g. Ethanol blending with petrol, pushing towards the usage of electric vehicles, and the Green Hydrogen Mission showcases India's commitment towards achieving a clean and green energy future.

Other programs include using large scale LEDs for the purpose of public lighting, promoting LEDs for domestic lighting and the program using clean fuel for household purposes. Saving the Environment has been one of the top priorities of the Modi government since the start, for example, several steps have been taken to minimize air pollution such as switching from BS-IV to BS-VI norms in fuels and vehicles since April 2020; intensification of the metro rails network for public transport; development of expressway and highways; introduction of ethanol blending and switching towards the faster adoption and manufacturing of electric vehicles (FAME)-2 schemes. [14]

Agriculture is one of the sectors which is worst affected by climatic change and environmental degradation. To tackle with the challenges faced specifically by this sector, the government is promoting the Integrated Nutrient Management program and the Soil Health Card Scheme. Various training programs are also being conducted such as KisanKosthis, IPM exhibitions and Farmers' Field Schools. [15]

Various challenges in implementing these initiatives:

- 1) **NAPCC 2.0:** Put forward in 2008, NAPCC is more than a decade old now. It focuses only on development and deployment of physical technology as a solution for tackling climatic change; but there is no explicit mention regarding the use of technologies like Artificial intelligence (AI), Internet of Things (IoT), Machine Learning, 5G, etc. either for climatic mitigation or

adaptation. India's position in the Global Innovation Index had improved significantly over the years and India has the record of being an innovation over-achiever relative to its economic development. India can harness this innovation to fortify its climate change actions. [16]

- 2) There is **absence of a role model or a global precedent** for India to undertake climate mitigation action along with working on economic development, increasing access to energy, poverty alleviation. Therefore, India's climate action plan has an unprecedented nature as India aims to bring about an energy transition simultaneously with addressing the growing needs of energy sector and meeting all the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- 3) The **costs of clean energy transfers** and gaining access to the innovations emerging in the R&D Labs of developed countries is another challenge for India, e. g. new 'Carbon capture and storage technique or new methods for cement and steel production which are low-carbon. Clean energy financing is an equally relevant concern. When clean energy technologies are developed in rich countries, then, the private companies patent the R&D facilities and transfer it to the developing countries including India at high prices. Thereby the cost of gaining access to such technologies becomes very high. The reason for this is that the ultimate cost will include the patent protection and licensing fee, leading to increased base cost and thereby increasing the size of the loan required to access that technology.
- 4) India has immense potential for renewable energy resources such as solar and wind but there uneven distribution throughout the country increases the transmission costs. For addressing this, the government has come forward with the "Green Corridor" investments. Further, India has interconnected all regional grids into one large 'NATIONAL TRANSMISSION NETWORK'
- 5) Till date, the major investment efforts towards climate mitigation are undertaken with the help of sovereign-guaranteed borrowing, External private commercial investments (including FDI), Commercial loans, green bonds or domestic public and private investor resources. The 'GREEN CLIMATE FUND' which was set up to provide a cumulative finance of \$10 Billion has also provided very limited finance. [17] About 80% of climate finance to developing countries including India is through the way of loans and not grants. The international climate change cooperation has also been complicated by COVID19 pandemic as it has placed enormous pressure on public budgets.

India Emerging As a Global Leader of Climate Change?

India has been globally acknowledged as a champion of climatic justice and CBDR. It has stood on behalf on developed countries and had provided unfettered support to them, both at an individual level and significant collaborations such as within the LMDCs and G77+China groups alongside having an engagement with countries like Brazil, China and South Africa (BASIC). India's influence on these groupings and further strengthening our engagements with these groups is the need of the hour as it will help in defending our strategic interests at the UNFCCC. [18]

Further, India's external collaborations strengthen its case for climatic justice and lobbying for the availability and accessibility for climatic finance and technologies. For example, The International Solar Alliance (ISA), Leadership Group for Industry Transition (LeadIT), Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI), etc. [19] further, when PM Modi visited US in September 2021, President Biden supported India's intention to achieve the goal regarding the installation of 450 GW of renewable power by 2030. He also emphasized the importance of finance mobilization for investing in renewable energy, storage and grid infrastructure. This can be achieved through the 'US-India climate and clean energy agenda 2030' partnership. When Danish president made a visit to India in November 2021, two research agreements on climate research were signed. India has such arrangements with several countries on multiple fronts.

But at the same time India needs to make sure that it does not remain the only major power to be fighting a lone battle against climatic change. India's economy is yet to bloom fully and therefore, working towards meeting all the obligations under Paris Climate Accord could prove to be detrimental to India and can hurt its economic interests. Therefore, India should focus on making sure that other G20 countries also fulfill their commitments. The hard reality is that every nation is busy boosting their own economies and have least concern for environment. India also needs to show sticks to bigger countries time to time so that they start behaving themselves. Modi government should be redirecting its energy from being a lone warrior to a compliance-ensuring body. If that can't be done, then the only option left for India is to focus on boosting our own economy and simultaneously adopting eco-friendly measures and policies. [20]

2. Way Forward

Indian Prime Minister has been pro-active both on the internal and external fronts as far as tackling climate change is concerned. Rather than being seen as obstructive, India wants to participate in the international climate negotiations on a constructive note, but that should not be coming at the cost of the country's legitimate interests and putting the future at risk. Much of India's efforts to reduce emissions has come through the increase in energy efficiency under multiple programs. The NDC regarding increased share of non-fossil fuels in its energy requirements seems to be on track. India has the cheapest solar power in the world. Therefore, tapping into the potential of the renewables like solar and wind potential will help in reducing reliance on coal.

India has adopted a unique stance on climate change. It is highly likely that India's emissions will grow at a faster pace through the next two to three decades as India also has other agendas to fulfill (poverty alleviation, economic growth, etc.) simultaneously. India's view is that countries should focus on what they've already promised or committed rather than setting up more targets through parallel discussions. India insists that the developed countries should be taking more ambitious climate actions as compensation to their earlier unfulfilled promises. [21]

The leading role that needs to be taken by the developed countries is further underlined and necessitated by the economic consequences of events such as COVID-19 and Russia Ukraine war. Although all countries have suffered economic losses, the developing or the emerging economies bear the greater brunt of it. Along with climate change, they have to simultaneously deal with the pressure of food and energy supplies, humanitarian crisis and lost importantly, economic growth. Therefore, the countries are becoming increasingly unequal on various fronts. It's highly unlikely that the developing countries including India would be spending more financial resources on tackling the consequences of climate change. It is only when India seeks out a balance amidst these challenges that it will be able to emerge as a 'VISHWAGURU'. [22]

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