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Politics of Climate Change

What is the world doing about climate change?

Since the 1960s and 70s, Climatologists and Environmentalist had evidence of increase in concentrations of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. However it took years before the international community responded to their call for action. In 1988, an Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) was created by the World Meteorological Organization and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) .

IPCC's first assessment report in 1990, pointed out that there was a real risk for humanity - "The earth's future is in danger" was the message. This spurred the international community to create the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) at the Rio Earth Summit of UNCED in June 1992. It was agreed to have a framework under which the world would aim at stabilizing greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous human induced interference with the climate system. The conference of parties to the framework (COP) was to meet every year to evolve strategies to combat Climate Change.



However, it was not until 1997 at the 3rd COP in Kyoto, that a protocol (The Kyoto Protocol) was established with legally binding commitments for the reduction of greenhouse gases industrialised countries. To enable the developed countries meet its commitment, it established three "flexible mechanisms", which allow developed countries to adjust its emissions activities. The most important of these is the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM).

CDM was supposed to provide an opportunity for developing countries to access modern technology for reducing emissions and receive financial incentives to overcome the barriers.

The logic was that developing countries who did not have legally binding emission reductions, would have financial incentives to develop



GHG emission reduction projects. This was supposed to be the sustainable development.

In reality it dis-incentivised highly polluting industry or luxury consumption, from finding climate friendly solutions (alternative paths to fossil fuel based growth), by providing a cheaper route to continue “business as usual”.

All in all the treaty established the principle of “common but differentiated” responsibility. By January 2009, 183 countries have ratified the Kyoto Protocol. The notable non-signers were US and Australia. In the protocol, there were several details that were not fully agreed to.

In its Fourth Assessment Report (AR4), the IPCC suggested a time frame and GHG reduction targets that would give the world a reasonable chance to keep warming to 2 degrees C over pre-industrial levels. The general consensus was that Annexe 1 countries would have to reduce GHG emissions ranging from 25% to 40% below 1990 levels by 2020, This was coupled with an overall assessment that world emissions should peak by 2015, and GHG emisisions should reduce to 50% below 1990 levels by 2050. For this, the developed countries need to reduce emissions by 80% or more below their 1990 levels.

Since no meaningful commitments to this end was forthcoming, negotiators at Bali (COP13) in 2007 evolved a two-track process :

- ***The Convention (UNFCCC) Track (now known more as the Long term Cooperation Track(LCA))*** , which would focus on four building blocks: adaptation, mitigation, technology transfer & deployment, and financing, and
- ***The Kyoto Protocol Track***, which would deal with the agreed emission reduction targets that was to be set in 2009, and the means including market mechanisms, to achieve these targets.

This was a compromise, which negotiators hoped would enable progress on some fronts like reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD); mitigation action from developing countries; and mitigation commitments from developed countries. On the Kyoto protocol track there was not much headway, and in December 2009 at Copenhagen (COP 15) the Kyoto track reach a dead end as the biggest emitter, the US was unwilling, along with other major developed countries to take the deep emission cuts needed. There was an impasse.

At this juncture, President Obama put this back door proposal before the BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India, China – emerging countries) countries. He proposed that 1) Industrialised countries to put on the table what emission reduction target they are willing or ‘able’ to do and 2) Developing countries must list their specific mitigation action and subject these to verification. Thus emerged the **Copenhagen Accord**, which was not accepted by many countries and therefore only “taken note of” by the COP. However, by March 2010, more than 110 nations including India, China and the US submitted their commitments indicating their acceptance of the Copenhagen Accord. Recent Wikileaks of cables indicated that many countries were coaxed with incentives to join in.

The Cancun conference in December 2010 then more or less laid the basis for the burial of the Kyoto Protocol. The per-capita based as well as historic emission based equity principle seems to have been blunted. What emerged is a set of commitments, which are subject to verification, but fall much short of required commitments. Funding was the carrot used particularly to get the small island states in line. Even so, no clear commitment or modality for any financial incentives were disclosed. The powers that be seem to expect further negotiations and incentives to get developing countries to raise their commitments, to make up the gap between current commitments and to desired levels.

REDD - Reducing emissions from deforestation and degradation . It is concerned primarily with deforestation and financial compensation for it.

REDD Plus - includes measures to reduce emission through, conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks. India is one of the countries that pushed for REDD Plus

One of the measures that emerged was a set of proposals called the Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD). This development has important implications for forests in general and forest communities in particular.

Basically the Cancun decision and outcomes (about 20 odd) has given more prominence to the "Long Term Cooperative Action track". The attempt seems to be that the elements of Climate Mitigation and Adaptation in the Kyoto track is made redundant by getting both Annexe 1 and non Annexe 1 countries (through NAMAS - Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Actions) to commit to emission cuts, and have them externally verified. The only difference would be that non-Annexe1 countries would get international financial and technological support for their efforts. Corporates in India especially seem to welcome this as they see in it an opportunity to broaden the scope of CDM like mechanisms.

It is likely that individual polluters in developing countries would press for them to purchase CERs from within their countries, as well as from other lesser developed countries. Corporate in the developed countries would however try to retain their comparative advantage using finance capital and technology. Thus while there is the carrot of 100 billion dollars, there is no indication of the sources of such money and the conditions that would be attached to such finance.

The Indian Response to Climate Change

At the international level, India has stood firm on the per-capita-based equity principle. At the time of Kyoto (1997), India had a low per capita emission rate barely 0.8 tce (tonnes of coal equivalent). Being an emerging country, by 2005, the total emissions took it to 5th highest in the world, though per capita emissions remained low – 1.2 tce. Thus it was labeled by the international media as “dangerous emitters”, likely to become even more dangerous in the future. The Northern countries started putting pressure on countries like India to consider mitigation actions to ‘build trust’ with Annexe 1 countries.

Perhaps, as a counter to all these pressures, in June 2008, India pulled out the proverbial rabbit out of the bag in the form of the **National Action Plan on Climate Change**, the stated principles of which were:

- Protecting the poor and vulnerable sections of society through an inclusive and sustainable development strategy, sensitive to climate change.
- National growth objectives through a qualitative change in direction
- Efficient and cost-effective strategies for end use Demand Side Mgmt.
- Deploying appropriate technologies for adaptation & mitigation
- Engineering new forms of market, regulatory and voluntary mechanisms to promote sustainable development.
- Creating unique linkages, including with civil society and local government institutions and through public-private-partnership.
- Welcoming international cooperation for research, development, sharing and transfer of technologies

This is to be achieved through 8 national missions: on 1. Solar energy; 2. Enhanced Efficiency; 3. Sustainable Habitat; 4. Water Mission; 5. Sustaining the Himalayan Ecosystem; 6. Green India; 7. Sustainable Agriculture and 8. Strategic Knowledge for Climate Change

In the last 3 years, India has fleshed out some of its missions:

The Jawaharlal Nehru National Solar Mission envisages implementation in three stages leading up to an installed capacity of 20,000 MW by the end of the 13th Five Year Plan in 2022, with 1,100 MW of solar power through the electricity grid and 200 MW off the grid, in its first phase; and a ‘focussed R&D programme.’ At the launch of the mission, the PM called for creation of ‘solar valleys’ on the lines of the Silicon Valley!

The National Water Mission has five goals:

- Comprehensive water database in public domain by 2011 and assessment of impact of climate change on water resources by 2012.
- Promote citizen and state action for water conservation, augmentation and preservation – includes expeditious implementation of irrigation projects, minor irrigation schemes, groundwater development, mapping flood-affected areas, capacity-building and awareness
- Focused attention on over-exploited areas – intensive rainwater harvesting and groundwater recharge programmes, pursuing enactment of groundwater regulation and management bill
- Increasing water use efficiency by 20 percent – both on the demand side and the supply side, particularly in the agriculture and commercial sectors. Guidelines for incentivizing recycled water, water neutral and water-positive technologies, improving efficiency of urban water supply systems, benchmark studies for urban water use, water efficiency indices for urban areas, manuals for mandatory water audits in drinking water, irrigation and urban systems, promoting water-efficient techniques including sprinkler and drip irrigation systems
- Promote basin-level integrated water resources management – basin-level management strategies, review of National Water Policy in order to ensure integrated water resources management, appropriate entitlement and appropriate pricing. (Review of State Water Policy and review and adoption of a National Water Policy by March 2013. T. N. Narasimhan, <http://www.thehindu.com/2010/06/08/stories/2010060856501100.htm>)

The National Mission for Enhanced Energy Efficiency is expected to save 23 million tonne oil equivalent of fuel and avoid the need to build additional capacity of over 19,000MW, leading to greenhouse gas emissions reduction of 98.55 million tonnes per year, and will add towards the country's target of reducing its emission intensity by 20-25% below 2005 levels.

Finally, we have the **Green India Mission**: enhancing carbon sinks in sustainably managed forests and other ecosystems, adaptation of vulnerable

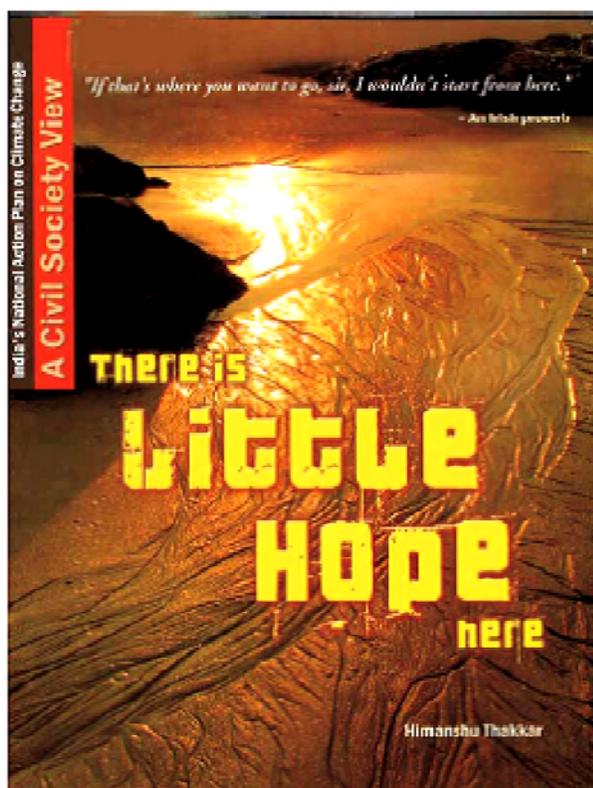
species & ecosystems to the changing climate, and adaptation of forest-dependant local communities in the face of climatic variability. Its goals include the afforestation of 6 million hectares of degraded forest lands and expanding our forest cover from 23% to 33% of the country's geographic area.

The Corporate Sector has generally welcomed the Plan. One of the key initiatives was the Corporate Action Plan on Climate Change, a white paper by TERI-BCSD India in February 2009, which has come out with its own ideas on the Challenges Ahead, and the Way Forward for each of the Missions. BCSD - Business Council for Sustainable Development has followed this through with key initiatives on different missions with various corporate and consultancy bodies.

All these take forward the market based ideas of the NAPCC.

Civil Society critique of the NAPCC

- Civil Society has criticised the secretive, exclusive process that excluded the majority of the country from having a voice in its conception, process and planning. NGOs feel that whilst the NAPCC preamble has lofty principles, its proposals are mostly business as usual.
- Further the NAPCC ignores the key issues of equity within India, and resorts to the market mechanisms such as the CDM, which only increases inequity. Much of what the government claims as adaptation is merely a repackaging of existing programmes.
- There is a dangerous advocacy of large dams as part of the National Water Mission. Whilst the Water Mission makes the necessary obeisance to localized water harvesting, it still focuses on large storage and major hydro projects, and capital intensive technologies for centralised water



distribution. Groundwater, the mainstay of the harvesting system for domestic and irrigation use, receives very little attention. There is very little radical thinking on urban and industrial use.

- The National Solar Mission is an ambitious mission. There are some issues relating to the regime of incentives and subsidies. The plan however seems to ignore the potential of Solar and other renewable as a means of decentralised generation and use of energy, particularly in villages that have no electricity. India's persistent moves to go in for nuclear power, as a 'clean power' as compared to fossil fueled power, comes in for universal criticism among civil society critics across the country.
- There is lip-service paid to small farmers and their dryland farming technology, the focus on solutions seems to be on bio-technology; with little or no learning from the green revolution that has led India up the unsustainable fossil-fueled based path to agricultural 'development'.

Civil Society maintains that the decades of involvement at the grassroots on issues relating to food production and distribution, watershed management and forest development and protection is finally being validated by the need for a low carbon path to equitable and sustainable development. The models and results are there for all to see; there is very little evidence of such awareness, understanding and acceptance in any of the missions.

The NAPCC focuses largely on mitigation, and leaves very little space for adaptation to changes that are already taking place, and affecting small farmers, traditional fisher folk, and forest-based communities. Its economic focus belies the basis in equity and 'inclusive and sustainable development strategy, sensitive to climate change' that is amongst the first statements of principles of the Plan: By putting the economy ahead of the environment, the NAPCC inevitably is full of prescriptions lack scientific rigour, and the proposed actions are incoherent and at times paradoxical, considering the government's ideas of economic development. The various positive suggestions in the report are not accompanied by identifying any current economic policies and actions that may need to be done away with, which may be harmful to climate. (Missing the mountain for the snow, Sudhirendar Sharma , INDIA TOGETHER, 24 Jul 2008)

We need to democratize the debate and action on climate change – in intent, process and implementation. A National Action Plan needs a debate on the larger vision of a low-carbon path to development, development that is inclusive, and provides for inter-generational ecological equilibrium and balance.

The Govt of India's Green India Mission suggests:

- Training on silvicultural practices for fast-growing and climate-hardy tree species
- Reducing fragmentation of forests by provision of corridors for species migration, both fauna and flora
- Enhancing public and private investments for raising plantations for enhancing the cover and the density of forests
- Revitalizing and upscaling community-based initiatives such as Joint Forest Management and Van Panchayat committees for forest management
- Formulation of forest fire management strategies
- In-situ and ex-situ conservation of genetic resources, especially of threatened flora and fauna
- Creation of biodiversity registers (at national, district, and local levels) for documenting genetic diversity and the associated traditional knowledge
- Effective implementation of the Protected Area System under the Wildlife Conservation Act and National Biodiversity Conservation Act 2001ⁱ

However, the Government is yet to come up with a final design for this mission.ⁱⁱ

Ashish Kothari, commenting on the GIM says that one of the biggest weaknesses is the complete absence of a strategy to prevent the loss of standing forests. While the MoEF formulates greening programmes, the Government of India is busy de-greening India. Between 1999 and 2007, about 50,000 ha of forest land, some of it with good standing forests, was diverted annually to non-forest use. If the ultimate objective of any green India mission is to help counteract climate change and its impact, surely it is important to conserve what still exists while also regenerating what has been degraded

The GIM's second major weakness could be governance, given the fact that mostly JFM is dominated by bureaucracy and particularly the lack of coherence between different Departments of Forests, Tribal/Social Welfare, and Rural Development.ⁱⁱⁱ

From Copenhagen to Cancun

In the Copenhagen Accord that India and other countries agreed upon in Copenhagen, repeated references are made to a scheme called "REDD plus". Paragraph 6 of the Accord recognised..."

“the crucial role of reducing emission from deforestation and forest degradation and the need to enhance removals of greenhouse gas emission by forests”

and agreed

“on the need to provide positive incentives to such actions through the immediate establishment of a mechanism including REDD plus, to enable the mobilization of financial resources from developed countries.”

As per its earlier submissions, the government of India wants to make it possible to earn “carbon credits” (i.e. tradeable permits certifying that emissions of greenhouse gases have been reduced somewhere else) on the basis of carbon supposedly stored in forests.

India's approach to REDD

India advocates a comprehensive approach to REDD which has been termed as REDD Plus approach. This approach argues for compensating countries not only for 'reducing deforestation' but also for 'conservation, sustainable management of forest and increase in forest cover' (ICFRE 2007). The basic principle of this approach is that a unit of carbon saved is equal to a unit of carbon added. In its submission to UNFCCC in August 2009, India has elaborated REDD as 'Reducing Emissions from Deforestation in Developing countries, SFM and Afforestation and Reforestation which further substantiates its approach (MoEF 2009).

India advocates a mechanism outside the purview of CDM, with a national level accounting for REDD. Indian approach on financing REDD activities has changed from strict fund based approach to a mix of market and fund based approaches, a central funding should compensate for maintenance of forest carbon stocks whereas money for compensating change in carbon stocks (due to decrease in deforestation and degradation or increase in forest cover) could be generated by selling carbon credits in the international markets (MoEF 2009).

Civil Society organisations in India feel that the REDD Plus approach would promote more business than mitigate because the communities have neither participated in these formulations nor will they be involved in its implementation.

We shall return to this issue in the concluding section.

ⁱ India's National Action Plan on Climate Change, climate-leaders.org, <http://www.climate-leaders.org/climate-change-resources/india-and-climate-change/indias-national-action-plan-on-climate-change>

ⁱⁱ Jairam Ramesh calls for convergence on reducing biodiversity loss, Thaindian.com, Saturday, May 22, 2010, http://www.thaindian.com/newsportal/feature/jairam-ramesh-calls-for-onvergence-on-reducing-biodiversity-loss_100368148.html

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.hinduonnet.com/fline/stories/20100730271509000.htm>

