

Cop 27 and India: All is well that ends well

Rjumohan A

Research Scholar, Gulati Institute of Finance and Taxation, Thiruvananthapuram

Introduction

Climate science is now categorically clear that human activities - especially fossil-fuel combustion since the Industrial Revolution - have consistently and in a very short span of time considerably increased the concentration of heat-trapping GHGs, such as carbon dioxide (via fossil-fuel combustion and deforestation), methane (from rice cultivation, livestock, landfills, and other sources) and chlorofluorocarbons (from industrial sources)¹, consequently rapidly warming the Earth's atmosphere (Global warming), thereby fuelling distinctly rapid changes to the climate. Needless to add, the IPCC Fourth Assessment Report (AR4), the U.S. Geological Survey, and other reports categorically summarise this consensus scientific fact on anthropogenic climate change.

We are already experiencing the economic and social impacts of climate change (Bruce et al., 1996). According to the Fourth National Climate Assessment, published in 2018 by the US Global Change Research Program, warmer temperatures, sea level rise, and extreme weather damage property and critical infrastructure, impact human health and productivity, and negatively affect sectors such as agriculture, forestry, fisheries, and tourism, among others. Impacts from extreme-weather events hit the poorest countries hardest as these are particularly vulnerable to the damaging effects of a hazard, have a lower coping capacity, and may need more time to rebuild and recover (Eckstein et al., 2021). The Global Climate Risk Index of the German think tank, Germanwatch, analyses and ranks to what extent countries and regions have been affected by impacts of climate-related extreme weather events (storms,

¹ <https://www.britannica.com/science/climate-change/>. Accessed on 12 June 2022

floods, heatwaves, etc.), with lower index scores indicating higher risk. Accordingly, India has been one of the worst-hit countries in the world, with a climate risk index of less than 20 in many recent years.

A phenomenon termed 'Hothouse Earth' illustrates a scenario where the Earth's temperature exceeds the threshold limit, plummeting it into a perpetually warm state where no countermeasures to reduce temperature will be effective. We are predicted to be just 2°C away from hitting the next hot earth stage. A full de-carbonization of the world economy by 2050 will still result in a temperature rise of 2.5°C to 3°C². And hence it is advised that the world is to keep warming well below 2° (3.6°F) globally, and that comes with the challenge of a low carbon budget. Scientists estimate that humans can only emit 565 more gigatons of carbon dioxide and reasonably hope to meet the 2° target-a budget that would be exhausted in 15 years if emissions continue at the current rate of 36.6 gigatons of CO₂ a year³.

India has not been historically one of the largest emitters and its annual per capita emission is one of the lowest, about one-third of the global average⁴. However, there have been efforts by some of the advanced countries to bracket India along with the largest emitters. Therefore, it is imperative to study India's efforts to preserve its right to Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities (CBDR-RC) at COP 27; and this study is an attempt to briefly examine this case.

What follows is divided into three sections. The next section discusses the historical background of the UN Conference of the Parties (COP), and Section three seeks to analyse the implications of the recently concluded COP 27 by contextualising India's key role in the Conference. The last section concludes the study.

COP 27: The background

This matter of urgency has elicited a wide range of responses from the global community. It was the 1972 United Nations Scientific Conference on the Human Environment, also known as the First Earth Summit, that adopted a Declaration setting out principles for the

² <https://www.greenpeace.org/international/story/18394/rex-weyler-hothouse-earth/>. Accessed on 12 January 2020.

³ <https://www.climatecentral.org/news/the-last-time-co2-was-this-high-humans-didnt-exist-15938>. Accessed on 12 January 2020.

⁴ <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1876119#:~:text=Responding%20to%20the%20call%20for,as%20an%20alternate%20energy%20source>. Accessed on 09 January 2023.

preservation and enhancement of the human environment, that raised the issue of climate change for the first time⁵. The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, popularly known as the Earth Summit, in 1992 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, opened up for signature of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC); the parties to the convention meet annually in Conferences of the Parties (COP) to assess progress in dealing with climate change. The COP 16 held in Mexico from 28 November to 10 December 2010 recognized the IPCC Fourth Assessment Report (AR4) goal of a maximum 2°C global warming and agreed to mobilise by 2020 US\$100 billion per annum 'Green Climate Fund' from the developed countries to assist developing countries in adaptation and mitigation practices to counter climate change, marking the genesis of Climate Finance.

Naturally, the logical culmination of all these was the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals, also called the Global Goals, with 17 SDGs at its core, that came to replace the Millennium Development Goals in 2015 to provide all people peace and prosperity by 2030. SDG 13 urges climate action to combat climate change for which 196 countries adopted the Paris Agreement at the COP 21 in Paris on 12 December 2015; the Agreement came into force on 4 November 2016, with the goal of limiting global warming to well below 2 degrees Celsius, preferably to 1.5 degrees Celsius, compared to pre-industrial levels⁶.

COP 27 and India

The 2022 United Nations Climate Change Conference or the 27th Conference of the Parties of the UNFCCC (COP 27) was held from 6 November until 20 November 2022 in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt, with more than 92 heads of state and an estimated 35,000 representatives, or delegates, of 190 countries attending. Below we give an account of the important outcomes of the Conference and India's responses.

Cop 27 outcomes

⁵ <https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/stockholm-kyoto-brief-history-climate-change>. Accessed on 2 July 2022.

⁶ <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/the-paris-agreement#:~:text=The%20Paris%20Agreement%20is%20a,compared%20to%20pre%2Dindustrial%20levels>. Accessed on 12 August 2022.

(i) Loss and damage fund

For the last three decades, the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) and poorer countries had been calling for compensation from developed countries, the largest emitters, for the climate change-induced damages to their communities. Though the emitters were ready to offer up a "mosaic of solutions" like insurance and early warning systems, the demand finally prevailed, under the pressure also from the G-27 (including India), and was rightfully hailed as a historic development at COP 27. Key details about the management of the fund, its contributors and their shares were left to a 'transnational committee' to chalk out and their proposal would be presented for adoption at COP28 next year. Loss and Damage (L&D) refers to impacts of climate change that cannot be avoided either by mitigation or adaptation and include economic damage to property, loss of livelihoods and destruction of biodiversity and culturally important sites.

ii) AWARe (Action on Water Adaptation or Resilience)

Launched by COP 27 in partnership with World Meteorological Organization (WMO), AWARe is an initiative that will champion inclusive cooperation to address water-related challenges and solutions across climate change adaptation, such as (a) decreasing water losses worldwide and improving water supply, (b) proposing and supporting policy and methods for cooperative water-related adaptation action and its co-benefits and (c) promote cooperation and interlinkages between water and climate action in order to achieve SDG 6. It aims to contribute to a successful outcome at the 2023 UN Conference on Water.

(iii) Infrastructure Resilience Accelerator Fund (IRAF)

A multi-donor trust fund established with the support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR); IRAF was launched by the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI) at the India Pavilion of COP 27. Supported by India, the UK, Australia and the European Union, it aims to support global action on disaster resilience of infrastructure systems, especially in developing countries and Small Island Developing States (SIDS), with around 50 million dollars in financial commitments already announced over an initial duration of 5 years.

(iv) Global Shield Plan

The Global Shield, a funding mechanism that provides funding to countries suffering climate disasters, is designed to be coordinated by the Group of 7 (G7) and the V20 group of climate-vulnerable countries. Vulnerable Twenty (V20) Group was established at the inaugural meeting of V20 Ministers of Finance of the Climate Vulnerable Forum in 2015 in Lima, Peru, with 58 member nations (India is not a member of the V20 Group). The Plan aims to (a) close urgent protection gaps in countries by designing, funding, and facilitating interventions; (b) provide pre-arranged insurance and disaster protection funding after events such as floods, droughts and hurricanes hit; and (iii) complement the progress on loss and damage.

(v) Technology Mechanism

The UNFCCC launched the first joint work programme of the Technology Mechanism for 2023-2027 to focus on high-potential sectors and high-potential actions across water, energy, food, industry, and other systems.

(vi) Global Offshore Wind Alliance (GOWA)

Initiated by the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), Denmark and the Global Wind Energy Council to bring together governments, the private sector, international organisations and other stakeholders to ramp up the offshore wind power to tackle the climate and energy security crises, GOWA welcomed new countries including Germany, Japan, the UK, the US, Australia, etc. into its fold during the COP 27.

Role of India

India was a key actor at the international climate negotiation table, by strongly reiterating her commitment to the underlying issues of global justice and equity; at the same time, India objected to the use of terms such as 'major or top emitters' in the cover text of the Summit. Even though India is ranked the third 'largest emitter', her per capita emission remains one of the lowest (only 1.77 tonne, against 14.22 tonne of the US and 15.25 tonne of Australia, as in 2020). "The Summary for Policy Makers (SPM) of the Working Group III contribution to the Sixth Assessment Report (AR6) of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) [2022] has noted clearly that the contribution of entire Southern Asia is only about 4% of historical cumulative net anthropogenic emissions between 1850 and 2019, even though the

region includes almost 24% of the global population" (Government of India 2022:1). Acknowledging India as a major emitter would unjustifiably and incorrectly bracket her among the developed countries, who have been historically responsible for climate change. Hence, India unequivocally asserted her resistance to this as an attempt to undermine the principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities (CBDR-RC). Further, India also highlighted the regrettable fact that the world is still unequal with glaring disparities in energy usage, emissions, and incomes among countries, and therefore pressed for the provision of enhanced climate finance for poorer economies to cope with the impacts of climate change while agreeing to effect emission reduction based on respective capabilities.

According to the Climate Change Performance Index 2023 of the Germanwatch, India was ranked 8th out of 63 countries, thanks to its low emissions and the increasing use of renewable energy. In this background, we give an account of India's contributions to COP 27 below:

(i) Long Term-Low Emission Development Strategy (LT-LEDS)

India is the 58th country to submit its plans that focus on the strategic transition of high-emission sectors and a discussion of India's climate adaptation needs to the UNFCCC.

India had made two significant commitments at the COP26 held in Glasgow in 2021: (a) meeting 50 percent of her energy needs from renewable fuels by 2030 and (b) transitioning to a net zero carbon economy by 2070. Reiterating that "India is committed to pursuing low-carbon strategies for development and is actively pursuing them, as per national circumstances" (Government of India 2022: 2), the document on LT-LEDS, released at COP 27, also quotes a recent analysis by a sub-committee of India's Ministry of Finance that has estimated that the cumulative total expenditure for adapting to climate change in India would amount to INR 85.6 trillion (at 2011-12 prices) by the year 2030 (DEA, 2020).

Though the strategy document does not specify mid-term targets, India's other policies clearly offer insights into the net-zero pathway. For example, the National Hydrogen Mission launched in 2021 aims to make India a green hydrogen hub, and other clean energy plans such as 20 percent ethanol blending with petrol to burn less fossil fuel by 2025 and electric vehicle project. Adoption of these technologies in turn requires industries to make large-scale

changes: share of electricity in industrial energy will have to multiply three-fold by 2070; electricity-driven four-wheelers should constitute 70-80 percent of the road traffic, and so on. That China dominates the market of most essentials in the electric vehicle supply chain is perhaps one reason for the strategy document to talk about scenarios in which fossil fuels continue to constitute a significant part of the energy mix in India, such as using the method of carbon capture and storage (CCS), a key constituent of decarbonisation strategies of countries such as the UK, to remove GHGs before they enter the atmosphere. India should find ways to make knowledge transfers in these emerging technologies part of its trade pacts with rich countries.

(ii) In Our LiFEtime campaign

This campaign was jointly launched by the Indian Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) at a side event of the COP 27 in Egypt on 14th November 2022, to encourage youth between the ages of 18 to 23 years to become message bearers of sustainable lifestyles. It also aims to foster responsible consumption patterns and influence the lifestyle choices of the younger generations to make them Pro-Planet-People.

(iii) Lifestyle for Environment (LiFE)

Introduced by the Indian Prime Minister during UNFCCC - COP 26 at Glasgow in 2021, LiFE is an international mass movement that recognizes the power of individual actions to protect and preserve the environment and envisions replacing the prevalent 'use-and-dispose' economy with a circular economy, which is cultivated by mindful choices. It also aims to develop a global network of individuals by nurturing "Pro Planet People". India also furthered the vision of LiFE by launching the LiFE Global Movement on the occasion of World Environment Day, on 5th June 2022. India has included LiFE in its Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) to take climate-oriented actions.

(iv) Leadership for Industry Transition (LeadIT) Summit

Launched by Sweden and India at the UN Climate Action Summit in 2019, LeadIT is supported by the World Economic Forum. At COP 27, India and Sweden hosted the LeadIT Summit 2022. The initiative focuses on the low carbon transition of the hard-to-abate

industrial sector and gathers countries and companies that are committed to action to achieve the Paris Agreement.

(v) MoEFCC - UNDP Compendium

India launched the Ministry of Environment Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) - UNDP Compendium "Prayaas Se Prabhaav Tak - From mindless consumption to mindful utilization" on the sidelines of COP 27 on 14 November 2022. The compendium highlights traditional best practices from India that embody the ethos of LiFE in the following areas:

- (a) Responsible Consumption by taking only as much as is needed, using products to the end of their lives, and repurposing or recycling whatever is left over.
- (b) Circular Economy to improve resource efficiency, minimize waste and emissions to reduce the carbon footprint and improve ecological handprint.
- (c) Living in Harmony with Nature by practising the philosophy of '*Vasudhaiv Kutumbkam*' (the World in One Family) and living a life with compassion for all living beings.
- (d) Sustainable Resource Management through mindful and deliberate utilisation of the available resources and to reduce overconsumption and promote equitable access to resources.
- (e) Coexistence and Cooperation among countries and communities through the promotion of science and innovation, knowledge exchange, dissemination of best practices, and conservation of traditional knowledge systems.

Conclusion

India has undoubtedly emerged at COP 27 as an essential, active and influential party such as to display a duty to solution-finding while being steadfastly committed to safeguarding the interests of developing and underdeveloped economies. This is evident in India's wholehearted support of the establishment of the Loss and Damages Fund, meant to compensate the most vulnerable countries for climate change-induced damages. At the same time, India has minced no words in stating that she would have no responsibility to contribute

to the proposed fund but would rather stake her claims to it to cope with the impacts of climate change.

India has also stood in support of the BRICS nations to oppose the proposed Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism of the European Union to tax carbon-intensive products such as cement, fertilisers, steel, etc. from 2026 onwards. India along with the BRICS allies has strongly argued that such taxes could result in market distortion and aggravate the trust deficit among the Parties and hence must be avoided, as such discriminatory and unfair market 'solutions' would lead to balance of trade issues between developed and developing economies. According to the group, the developed nations, instead, should lead others by fulfilling their finance and emission reduction commitments in an effort to protect the equity principle that no country is unfairly made to suffer disproportionately the burden of climate mitigation.

India has again made her presence strongly felt in the case of the efforts to reduce the usage of fossil fuels, by reiterating her proposal to phase down 'all fossil fuels' and not 'just coal'. India has taken the cue from a proposal, supported by the European Union at the Glasgow COP in 2021, that non-coal fuels such as oil and natural gas also contribute to greenhouse gases and hence must be phased down on an equal footing with coal. This stance however goes unsurprising, given India's heavy reliance on coal to meet her electricity demand. The 'all-fossil-fuel-phase-down' proposal has expectedly been countered by the oil and gas producing countries, mainly the USA and Saudi Arabia, and the text has finally settled on "coal phase down".

References

- Bruce, J. P., Lee, H., & Haites, E. F. (1996). *Climate change 1995. Economic and social dimensions of climate change*. IPCC.
- DEA. 2020. *Report of the Sub-Committee for the Assessment of the Financial Requirements for Implementing India's Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC)*. Department of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Finance, Government of India. <https://dea.gov.in/sites/default/files/Sub%20Committee%20Report%20Final.pdf>
- Eckstein, D., Künzel, V., & Schäfer, L. (2021). Global climate risk index 2021. *Who Suffers Most from Extreme Weather Events, 2000-2019*.

- Government of India (2022). *India's long-term low-carbon development strategy*. Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, New Delhi.
- IPCC. 2022. *Climate Change 2022: Mitigation of Climate Change - Summary for Policymakers*. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg3/downloads/report/IPCC_AR6_WGIII_SPM.pdf.
- Pachauri, R. K., & Reisinger, A. (2007). *IPCC fourth assessment report*. IPCC, Geneva, 2007.
- Paris agreement. *In Report of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (21st Session, 2015: Paris)*. Retrived December (Vol. 4, p. 2017). HeinOnline.
- Reidmiller, D. R., Avery, C. W., Easterling, D. R., Kunkel, K. E., Lewis, K. L. M., Maycock, T. K., & Stewart, B. C. (2018). *Fourth national climate assessment. Volume II: Impacts, Risks, and Adaptation in the United States, Report-in-Brief*.
- United Nations General Assembly (1987). *Our Common Future: Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development*. Transmitted to the General Assembly as an Annex to document A/42/427 – Development and International Co-operation: Environment.
- United Nations 1992, UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). unfccc.int/files/essential_background/background_publications_htmlpdf/application/pdf/conveng.pdf. Accessed 12 June 2022.
- United Nations Environment Programme (2016). *Definitions and Concepts – Background Note*.
- United Nations Sustainable Development Goals: The Sustainable Development Agenda. Accessed June 19, 2022.