



Research Paper

India's Action Towards Sustainable Development: After Paris Summit

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ABSTRACT

The global consciousness for the protection of environment in the early seventies prompted Government of India (GOI) to amend the Constitution of India in 1976, to mandate that protection and improvement of natural environment is the Duty of the State. In 1991, the Hon Supreme Court of India even made the environment a part of the Fundamental Rights of every Citizen by declaring that, "Right to live is a fundamental right under Art. 21 of the Constitution and includes the right of enjoyment of pollution free water and air for full enjoyment of life. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda) finalized by the United Nations includes 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 associated targets to measure the progress towards achievement of the 2030 Agenda. The SDGs are integrated and indivisible and balance the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. India has adopted the 2030 Agenda during the United Nations Summit held in September 2015. Unlike the Millennium Development Goals, which preceded the SDGs, provision of energy services has found an important place amongst the SDGs (United Nations, 2015). Specifically, SDG 7 is to: 'Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all.'

Key Words: Sustainable Development Goals, Climate Change, United Nation, civil society, Environment

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I. Introduction

Under the Paris Agreement of 2015, India submitted its set of Nationally Determined Contributions. NDCs are a set of long-term goals to cut carbon emissions and adapt to climate impacts. Every country signatory to the Paris Agreement has to submit these NDCs, and update them every five years. India's first NDCs included decreasing emissions intensity of India's GDP by 33-35% compared to 2005 levels by 2030; increase total cumulative electricity generation from clean energy sources to 40% by the same year and create an additional carbon sink of 2.5 to 3 billion tons through increasing forest and tree cover.

Though India is faring better at developing clean energy projects, it missed its 2022 renewable energy target of 175 GW. In August 2022, India The aim now is to reduce emissions intensity of its GDP by 45% by 2030 when compared to 2005 levels; achieve about 50% cumulative electric power installed capacity from non-fossil fuel-based energy resources by 2030; and push forward the concept of LiFE – Lifestyle for Environment – to promote and foster sustainable lifestyles and consumption patterns. (Forest Survey of India, 2021)

But while India is indeed implementing some actions to achieve its goals (for instance, India has one of the most rapidly developing renewable energy sectors in the world) and is faring better than many other nations, it has much distance to cover to fulfill all its promises. The Climate Action Tracker, which tracks the climate actions of around 40 countries and their impacts, rates India's overall climate action as "highly insufficient".

PARIS Agreement

The international political response to climate change began at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, where the 'Rio Convention' included the adoption of the UN Framework on Climate Change (UNFCCC). This convention set out a framework for action aimed at stabilizing atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases (GHGs) to avoid "dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system." The UNFCCC which entered into force on 21 March 1994 now has a near-universal membership of 195 parties.

The main objective of the annual Conference of Parties (COP) is to review the Convention's implementation. The first COP took place in Berlin in 1995 and significant meetings since then have included COP3 where the Kyoto Protocol was adopted, COP11 where the Montreal Action Plan was produced, COP15 in Copenhagen where an agreement to success Kyoto Protocol was unfortunately not realized and COP17 in Durban where the Green Climate Fund was created.

In 2015 COP21, also known as the 2015 Paris Climate Conference, will, for the first time in over 20 years of UN negotiations, aim to achieve a legally binding and universal agreement on climate, with the aim of keeping global warming below 2°C. France will play a leading international role in hosting this seminal conference, and COP21 will be one of the largest international conferences ever held in the country. The conference is expected to attract close to 50,000 participants including 25,000 official delegates from government, intergovernmental organizations, UN agencies, NGOs and civil society. (Forest Survey of India. 2011)

The goal of the Paris Agreement

1. To curtail the rise of global temperature this century below 2-degree Celsius, above pre-industrial levels; and also pursue efforts to limit the increase to 1.5 degrees Celsius.
2. Develop mechanisms to help and support countries that are very vulnerable to the adverse impacts of climate change. An example would be countries like the Maldives facing threat due to sea-level rise.
3. Confirms the obligation that developed countries have towards developing countries, by providing them financial and technological support.

India at COP 21

1. India put out a statement that we need to grow rapidly to meet the aspiration of 1.25 Billion populations, and out of this 300 Million people are without access to energy.
2. Yet despite the growing demands, India has pledged to reduce emissions intensity per unit GDP by 33-35% of 2005 levels
3. Aiming to reach 40% of installed capacity from non-fossil fuels.
4. Targeting 175 GW of renewable energy generation by 2022.
5. Planning to enlarge forest cover to absorb 2.5 Billion tonnes worth of carbon dioxide.
6. Reducing dependence on fossil fuels through levies and reduction in subsidies.
7. India exhorted on the principles of equity and differentiated responsibilities
8. As per India, equity means national commitments that must be consistent with the carbon space nations occupy.
9. India expects developed countries to mobilize 100 billion US dollars annually by 2020 for mitigation and adaptation in developing countries.

India's Action towards Sustainable Development

According to the United Nations SDG Index and Dashboards Report 2023, which assesses countries' progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the SDG Index Rank of India is 112 out of 166 countries, with an overall index score of 63.5 percent and spill-over score of 99.4 percent. India has made significant progress towards achieving several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Some notable achievements include:

Goal 1: No Poverty: India has successfully lifted millions of people out of poverty, reducing the poverty rate from 45% in 1993 to around 21% in 2011.

Goal 2: Zero Hunger: The prevalence of undernourishment in India has decreased from 18.2% in 2004-2006 to 14.5% in 2016-2018.

Goal 3: Good Health and Well-being: India has made significant improvements in maternal and child health, with a reduction in maternal mortality ratio from 254 per 100,000 live births in 2004-2006 to 113 in 2016-2018. Under-five mortality rate has also declined from 89 per 1,000 live births in 1990 to 34 in 2019.

Goal 4: Quality Education: India has achieved near-universal primary school enrolment, with a net enrolment rate of 98.3% in 2018.

Goal 5: Gender Equality: The female labour force participation rate in India increased from 22.5% in 2005 to 23.3% in 2019. The child marriage rate declined from 47% in 2005-2006 to 30% in 2015-2016.

Goal 6: Clean Water and Sanitation: Access to improved drinking water sources has increased from 73% in 1990 to 94% in 2017. Access to improved sanitation facilities has also improved, rising from 21% in 1990 to 71% in 2017. (Ministry of Jal Shakti. 2021)

These actions are listed under 7 categories namely energy saving, water saving, reduced use of single-use plastic, sustainable food systems, waste reduction adopting healthy lifestyle and e-waste handling. For reducing plastic use, 11 actions were highlighted in which one was use of recycled plastic over virgin plastic wherever possible.

This also leaves room for a special kind of plastic called Polyethylene Terephthalate (PET) which will need to be seen from a new prism of a green economy. PET plastic packaging can be made not only from its virgin grade but also from recycled PET as it is up to 100% recyclable. It not only recaptures the energy, but also translates into numerous life cycles for PET plastic bottles.

Currently, all over the world, everyone is focusing on circular economy, and so is India. Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) has played a pivotal role in promoting circular economy across all key sectors by actively formulating policies and promoting projects to drive the country towards a circular economy. Circular economy is cyclic in nature, directing the economy towards reuse, as opposed to waste at the end of a product's lifecycle.

According to the Chemicals and Petrochemicals Manufacturers Association of India, bottle production from PET accounts for 30% of the global demand. The PET packaging and recycling ecosystem in terms of GDP value is an astounding Rs 7.5 lakh crores and the industry is also one of the largest employment generators in the country, with an employment footprint exceeding 70 lakhs. It is no wonder then that over 50% of rag picker's earnings come from collecting used PET products.

In a recently launched report by Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), it was stated that almost 97% of the collected PET bottles are channelized for making fabric and all the bottles converted to fabric are then claimed to have been recycled as per the existing policies in the country. Many brands have recently taken charge of recycling pet bottles into garments, which is one method of reducing waste generation. Interestingly, Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) and Bisleri recycle millions of discarded mineral water, cold drinks and other PET bottles to make eco-friendly uniforms for their staff, with the help of advanced technologies.

The Indian PET recycling industry's turnover will be more than Rs. 13,500 Crores (\$1700 million) in the next 4-5 years. PET is slowly and surely becoming the first material of choice in rigid packages, due to its ease of recyclability and its current established recycling systems in India. Another focus which needs to be highlighted is the ban on Single-Use Plastics (SUPs) by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC). PET bottles are not banned but are often clubbed with other non-recyclable plastics undermining its unique properties. Small PET bottles (under 1 Litre) fall under threat of ban because of misinformation and faulty linkage with the SUP ban.

However, industry associations like PET Packaging Association for Clean Environment (PACE India) are conducting various initiatives and campaigns to dispel myths and advocate reuse and recyclability around PET plastics.

Today in India, more than 1000 Reverse Vending Machines (RVM) have been installed to encourage the public on the need for recycling and create awareness in the minds of decision-makers about the vast infrastructure existing for PET recycling in India. Recently Coca-Cola India has partnered with 10-Min grocery delivery service, Zepto, for a unique 'return and recycle' initiative for PET bottles. This joint initiative seeks to establish an organized process of collection of PET bottles with 100% traceability, to ensure effective plastic waste management.

PET plastic bottles are a popular choice for packaging due to the numerous benefits they provide both to manufacturers and consumers. However, there are myths related to them that are not accurate. For e.g., 'Plastic bottle left in a car will leach carcinogens into the soft drink it contains' but there are no carcinogens present in PET plastic. There is also a surprising myth that PET plastics can cause cancer whereas this is yet again factually incorrect. PET products are free from phthalates (i.e., phthalate ester plasticizers) and have no harmful consequences on human body.

A WHO report mentions that PET does not produce any cancer or endocrine-disrupting chemicals and it can be safely recycled. Another common myth is also circulated that glass or aluminum bottles are better than PET bottles. In a comparison of the environmental footprints of bottles, PET often performs better than glass or aluminum bottles as less carbon is emitted during the production of PET bottles than the production of glass bottles. Also, PET bottles are strong, light and shatterproof unlike glass or aluminum bottles. (NITI Aayog. 2019).

The SDGs build on the success of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and aim to go further to end all forms of poverty. The new Goals are unique in that they call for action by all countries, poor, rich and middle-income to promote prosperity while protecting the planet. They recognize that ending poverty must go hand-in-hand with strategies that build economic growth and addresses a range of social needs including education, health, social protection, and job opportunities, while tackling climate change and environmental protection.

They are formed of 17 goals and 169 targets. Between them, they should shape the policies of the 193 countries who committed to them over the next 15 years. These goals have the power to transform our world, and deliver a future in which people and nature thrive.

The SDGs are global plan of action for people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnerships. It is a cohesive environmental and social sustainability vision for all to align their core strategies to contribute to the quality of life and our planet.

The Sustainable Development Goals are a big step forward for achieving the equitable and environmentally sustainable economic development. They recognize that we all depend on the planet's natural resources (forests, rivers, oceans and land) such as resources such as clean water, arable land, plentiful fish and wood; and ecosystem services such as pollination, nutrient cycling and erosion prevention, and resilience to a changing climate for our social and economic wellbeing. Equally, they stress that our ability to use the planet's resources wisely depends upon creating a fair, sustainable and prosperous society, and decoupling our economies from fossil fuels and environmental damage.

If the 193 countries involved make good on their promise, by 2030 we will live in a world that has:

- halted the loss of biodiversity and saved threatened species from extinction
- ended deforestation
- put a stop to poaching and trafficking of protected species
- ended overfishing and significantly reduces the pollution of our oceans
- created an economy that grows without damaging the environment (NITI Aayog, 2019)

Poverty eradication, changing unsustainable and promoting sustainable patterns of consumption and production and protecting and managing the natural resource base of economic and social development are the overarching objectives of an essential requirements for sustainable development. All these are also crucial for India also to develop sustainably and remove disparity and bring about pro poor and inclusive growth. Environmental changes affect us all, especially the poorest people who are most vulnerable to food and water scarcity, and impacts of climate change. Putting ecosystems at the centre of development planning and managing natural resources in fair and accountable ways will bring economic and social benefits and ensure food, water and energy security for all.

India has 21 eco-regions with rich biodiversity and a vast proportion of tribal population heavily dependent on forests for subsistence. Challenges such as loss of biodiversity and marine resources, degradation of ecosystems and climate change will have adverse impact on the economy as agriculture and allied activities (livestock, fisheries and forestry) contribute to 17% of GDP.

INDIA'S PROGRESS ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

In September 2015, 193 countries including India committed to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as detailed in the UN resolution, "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development". The SDGs comprehensively cover social, economic and environmental dimensions and build on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which covered the earlier fifteen-year period from 2000 to 2015.

India has been making strides towards achieving the social, economic and environmental goals covered under SDGs. This achievement gains further significance in the face of the considerable human and economic costs imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has set countries back on their developmental goals and created serious impediments to the attainment of the SDGs, the world over. (Climate Bond Initiative. (2019)).

NITI Aayog has been publishing the SDG India Index annually since 2018. The third edition of the NITI Aayog SDG India Index (2020-21) computes goal-wise scores on the 16 SDGs for each state and UT, and a qualitative assessment on Goal 17, covering:

SDG 1: No Poverty SDG 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure

SDG 2: Zero Hunger SDG 10: Reduced Inequality

SDG 3: Good Health and Well-Being

SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities SDG 4: Quality Education

SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production

SDG 5: Gender Equality

SDG 13: Climate Action

SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation

SDG 14: Life Below Water (calculated only for the nine coastal states – Gujarat, Maharashtra, Goa, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha and West Bengal) SDG 7: Affordable and Clean Energy

SDG 15: Life on Land SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth SDG 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions

SDG 17: Global Partnerships Overall state and UT scores are generated from goal-wise scores to measure aggregate performance of the sub-national unit based on its performance across the 16 SDGs. (NITI Aayog, 2021)

Accelerating Progress on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

At the midway point to 2030, the global progress on SDGs is off-track with only 12 percent of the targets on track. During this Decade of Action, we will leverage the G20's convening power and its collective resolve to

fully and effectively implement the 2030 Agenda and accelerate progress toward the SDGs, in a timely manner, to shape the world we want to see for our future generations.

To accelerate progress on SDGs, we commit to taking collective action for effective and timely implementation of the G20 2023 Action Plan to Accelerate Progress on the SDGs, including its High-Level Principles. We will ensure that no one is left behind. We commend the efforts of the Indian Presidency to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda (Climate Bond Initiative.(2018)). To this end, we:

i. Recognize the role of digital transformation, AI, data advances, and the need to address digital divides. We endorse the G20 Principles on Harnessing Data for Development (D4D) and welcome the decision to launch Data for Development Capacity Building Initiative, and other existing initiatives.

ii. We reaffirm our commitment towards the mobilization of affordable, adequate and accessible financing from all sources to support developing countries in their domestic efforts to address bottlenecks for implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda. We call upon developed countries to fully deliver on their respective ODA commitment that complements and encourages development financing from all other sources, including public and private, domestic and international, in a timely manner, and contribute to addressing the financing needs of developing countries.

iii. Highlight the crucial role of tourism and culture as a means for sustainable socioeconomic development and economic prosperity, and take note of the Goa Roadmap for Tourism as one of the vehicles for achieving the SDGs.

iv. Commit to enhancing G20 cooperation and partnerships to address challenges being faced in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. We welcome ongoing efforts at the UN, including the Secretary General's efforts to address the SDG financing gap through an SDG stimulus, and will provide full support to the United Nations 2023 SDG Summit, the United Nations Summit of the Future, and other relevant processes. We reiterate our commitment to take action to scale up sustainable finance. In line with the G20 Sustainable Finance Roadmap, we welcome the analytical framework for SDG-aligned finance and voluntary recommendations for scaling up adoption of social impact investment instruments and improving nature-related data and reporting, informed by the stocktaking analyses, considering country circumstances.

II. Conclusion

India's performance on the NITI Aayog SDG India Index has improved from an overall score of 60 in 2019-20 to 66 in 2020-21. India has also been making significant strides in increasing its forest area, ranking third globally in net gain in forest area during the decade (2010-20). Much of India's increase in forest cover during 2011-21 is attributed to enhancement in very dense forest cover, which rose by approximately 20 per cent during the period. Open forest cover also improved by seven per cent during the period. Going forward, there is need to further improve forest and tree cover. Social forestry could also play a significant role in this regard. States/UTs need to improve management of its ground water resources through improving its recharge and by stemming its over-exploitation, and to prevent the critical and semi-critical assessment units from further worsening. There is a greater thrust on climate action following the announcement of India's target of becoming Net Zero by 2070. Climate finance will remain critical to successful climate action by developing countries, including India.

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