

## Climate Action: What's next for India

Neha Pahuja, Fellow, TERI<sup>1</sup> and Mekhala Sastry, Research Associate, TERI

The Indian subcontinent is currently in the middle of the South-west monsoons that plays a crucial role in the lives and livelihoods of the country. Several economic activities in the country are heavily dependent on this season, the chief of them being agriculture. Agriculture in India is predominantly rain-fed and any change in weather patterns will have devastating impacts on a large portion of the Indian population. It is estimated that 49% of the country is dependent on agriculture for their primary source of income<sup>2</sup>. A recent report by the Ministry of Earth Sciences provides evidence of changing climate over the country and its potential impacts. The report states that there has been a noted 0.7°C rise in average temperature that has been observed over India for the period from 1971-2018.<sup>3</sup>

While the country has always been dependent on the vagaries of the weather, there is now a new risk and threat that needs to be addressed- COVID19. Much like the rest of the world India has had to take drastic measures to halt the spread of the disease- with a countrywide lockdown, restriction of several economic activities, and social distancing measures. This has had massive ramifications on the socio-economic structure in the country. With the onset of the cyclone and monsoon season, the country has the added challenge to deal with a pandemic and extreme weather events. The issue of 'compounding risks' has now been brought to the forefront. For instance, maintaining social distancing norms in cyclone shelters when Cyclone Amphan made landfall in West Bengal was a challenge. This continues to be an issue in several states like Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra are facing flood like situations due to heavy rains.

The year 2020 was touted to be most crucial in the global discourse on climate change due to several reasons- countries to submit revised NDCs to reflect enhanced ambition; decisions on market mechanisms under the Paris Agreement. With important conferences- COP26 and the meetings of the Subsidiary Bodies being pushed to next year, there is a risk that it upsets processes like the Global stocktake which is to begin in 2023. This has further complicated the global response to climate change.

India is already well on its way to overachieve 2 out of 3 quantifiable targets set forth in the NDC by 2030- reducing emissions intensity of GDP by 33-35% from 2005 levels and 40% non-fossil fuel electric installed capacity in 2030. The third quantifiable target involving carbon sinks (additional 2.5-3GtCO<sub>2</sub>e carbon sinks) is still in progress. With the ongoing threat of a pandemic and the urgency of the climate threat, India should emphasize upon following 3 agenda items:

---

<sup>1</sup> Email: [neha.pahuja@teri.res.in](mailto:neha.pahuja@teri.res.in)

<sup>2</sup> MoEFCC. *Second Biennial Update Report to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change*. [moef.gov.in/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/India-Second-Biennial-Update-Report-to-the-United-Nations-Framework-Convention-on-Climate-Change.pdf](https://moef.gov.in/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/India-Second-Biennial-Update-Report-to-the-United-Nations-Framework-Convention-on-Climate-Change.pdf) (2018).

<sup>3</sup> Krishnan, R. *et al. Assessment of Climate Change over the Indian Region: A Report of the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES), Government of India*. <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007%2F978-981-15-4327-2> (2020) doi:10.1007/978-981-15-4327-2.

## ***1. Adaptation and Loss & Damage***

Addressing climate induced risks require conscious and serious efforts. This may require alignment of domestic institutions, governance and policy in the country so as to protect the communities at large and that is in line with the global adaptation goal as mentioned in the Paris Agreement. The Agreement also aims to strengthen the Warsaw International Mechanism on loss and damage. As highlighted by the Global Commission on Adaptation report in 2019, it is in the interest (environmental and economic) of the world to invest in resilient infrastructure<sup>4</sup>. The ongoing pandemic has also highlighted the concept of ‘decision making under uncertainty’. Scientific evidence that is now available points to a future with increasing extreme weather events that cause devastation to lives and livelihoods.

The pandemic response shows that society can adjust fast in the face of a crisis. A strong case can be made that ‘*uncertainty*’ is associated with both the ongoing pandemic (a cure/vaccine, a possible second wave of infections) and climate change (complexity associated with nature and scale of impacts on a temporal scale). Since COVID-19 was detected late last year, it has spread across 200 countries and has caused loss of lives in the thousands. The response to the pandemic has been swift and decisive even in the face of uncertainty. While this sort of uncertainty has always been associated with the climate discourse, climate change is still not considered as a crisis. With several studies providing robust scientific evidence of climate change and its impacts (including the SR 1.5 Report by IPCC), it must be recognized that the world does not have an indefinite deadline to address climate change. This needs to be emphasized and awareness at all levels is needed to take necessary actions.

## ***2. Enhancing mitigation efforts***

It is recognized that the world is still far behind on emissions reductions. The aggregate emissions pathway consistent with the goal of limiting warming to well-below 2C is well known, as is the aggregate gap with current emissions pathways. The need of the hour is to assess structural changes in high emitting sectors. Thus, assessment of the underlying transformation pathways is required. This can provide a more concrete picture of actionable indications of where and what precise efforts are required in a particular sector, technology, or when mitigation lever needs to be activated.

India’s approach to mitigation and associated co-benefits can be considered to be opportunistic in nature. There is merit in recognizing that India can follow a 1.5 degree path at a low cost by adopting a set of measures consistent with low carbon development while meeting the objective of inclusive economic growth, energy security and clean air. A set of institutional measures backed by appropriate policies are however required at the national and sub-national level.

---

<sup>4</sup> Bapna, M., Carter, B., Chan, C., Patwardhan, A. & Dickson, B. *Adapt Now: A Global Call for Leadership on Climate Resilience*. [https://cdn.gca.org/assets/2019-09/GlobalCommission\\_Report\\_FINAL.pdf](https://cdn.gca.org/assets/2019-09/GlobalCommission_Report_FINAL.pdf) (2019).

### **3. *Global stocktake (GST)***

Article 14 of the Paris Agreement requires the CMA to periodically take stock of the implementation of the Paris Agreement and to assess collective progress towards achieving the purpose of the Agreement and its long-term goals. The first GST will take place in 2023 and every five years thereafter. The ongoing pandemic has complicated the international climate discourse further, since the major climate conferences that had been scheduled for the year have been since postponed. This could potentially lead to a derailment in the processes of stocktake and review processes set up under the Paris Agreement. It is imperative now more than ever that countries adhere to the timelines provided within the Agreement or the world would run the risk of derailing the entire international climate process.

UNFCCC has launched the first phase of an important transparency process on countries' pre-2020 climate action<sup>5</sup>. This first phase consists of questions and answers period and follows on from an expert analysis of the reported information by countries earlier in the year. And forms part of the Multilateral Assessment (MA) and the Facilitative Sharing of Views (FSV) processes that are the foundation of the enhanced transparency framework under the PA. These interactive processes play a crucial role in building trust among countries. India has been leading in efforts to bring countries together as in case of international solar alliance. A constructive role in the transparency framework is required of India.

### **Conclusion**

A problem as complex, multifaceted and long-term as climate change can be solved only through a process of rapid social, technological and policy actions. The swift coordinated response in case of the pandemic shows, this is possible. India's stance has always been clear on the global stage that climate change must be addressed in the country while being conscious of the country's developmental agenda. With increasing recognition that development is impeded by the impacts of climate change adds to the problem. The development pathway of India is marked by the dependence on climate sensitive sectors- agriculture, water, health, infrastructure, natural ecosystems and forestry and energy. It is crucial to strengthen the knowledge on vulnerability to climate impacts and enhancing the understanding at a macro-level (sector or State) of changes required to build resilience to climate impacts. While India is committed to NDC till 2030, a long-term strategy is important to bring down emissions while pursuing sustainable growth and development. However, it is important to note that success of a long term strategy depends not only on the lessons learnt from implementing the short or medium term development strategies, but also international cooperation and coordination. Thus, accelerating change requires international cooperation on finance and technology.

---

<sup>5</sup> <https://unfccc.int/news/first-phase-of-interactive-transparency-processes-on-pre-2020-action-launched>