

PROTECTING THE PLANET: Role of the Youth

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Our main challenge is to develop economic, social and governance systems capable of protecting the planet, achieving sustainable levels of production and consumption while living in harmony with our natural environment. In our planet, access to clean air, water, and a liveable climate are inalienable human rights. We have only one planet and humankind must become accountable for the wanton destruction of our collective home. Protecting our future on this planet depends on the conscious evolution of the species and harmonious living with the planet at large.

India shares the concern of the international community about the need to protect the planet and the humanity from the impacts of climate change. Today, India faces the challenge of poverty eradication and sustainable development with sustaining its rapid economic growth while combating global threat of climate change. It may alter the distribution and quality of India's natural resources and adversely affect the livelihood of its people. Therefore, consider that while maintaining a high growth rate is essential for increasing living standards of our people, steps need to be taken to reduce their vulnerability to climate change.

A historic agreement to combat climate change and unleash actions encompassing mitigation, adaptation, finance, technology

development and transfer, capacity building and transparency of action and support was agreed by the world community in Paris on 12 December 2015. The universal agreement's main aim is to keep a global temperature rise this century well below 2 degrees Celsius and to drive efforts to limit the temperature increase even further to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels.

Youth represents the most dynamic segment of the population in any country and are the future of a nation. Young people's active and meaningful participation is indeed of crucial importance in all issues of concern. They are acting as the ambassadors of awareness campaign for educating the masses about our planet and its protection. They are encouraging the children to protect the biodiversity on the planet.

Humanity's main challenge for the 21st century is to develop economic, social and governance systems capable of protecting the planet, achieving sustainable levels of production and consumption while living in harmony with our natural environment. The environment is one of the primary determinants of individual and community health, and exposure to physical, chemical and biological risk factors in the environment can harm human health in various ways. Compounded by climate change, the pressures on terrestrial and marine

ecosystems and resources are major threats to the earth's biological life support systems, human well-being and development.



The global climate is changing due to the emission of greenhouse gases (GHGs). The scientific consensus is that global climatic changes are largely the result of increased concentration of carbon dioxide, methane and other greenhouse gases in the atmosphere primarily caused by human activities, use of fossil fuel and industrial expansion. These changes are expected to result in higher average temperatures, changed rainfall patterns, and increased severity and frequency of floods, droughts and cyclones, which can severely impact livelihoods, especially of the poor in developing countries. The global-average surface temperature is now about 0.8°C above its level in 1750, with most of the increase having occurred in the 20th century and the most rapid rise since 1970. These developments have the potential to lead to large scale local or regional disruptions in ecosystems and adversely impact food security, fresh water resources and human health resulting in increased loss of planet.

International Efforts to Protect the Planet

In the present situation, protecting the planet is the most important challenge for us. Meeting this challenge is essential if the sustainable development goals that world have adopted are to be achieved. In the year 1972, the relationship between development and environmental degradation was first positioned on the international agenda. It was at the UN Conference on the Human Environment held in Stockholm in 1972. After this conference, the governments set up the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). The UNEP which nowadays continues to function as a global catalyst for action to protect the environment. However, little was done in the subsequent years to integrate concerns about environment into national economic planning and decision-making process.



In 1983, the UN established the World Commission on Environment and Development. The commission put forward

the concept of sustainable development as an alternative approach. It is simply based on economic growth — “which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generation”.

After considering the 1987 Brundtland Report, the UN General Assembly called for the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED). The goals of the summit were to come to an understanding of development that would support socio-economic development. It was also to prevent the continued deterioration of the environment of the world. It laid a foundation for a global partnership between the developing and the more industrialised countries. It was based on mutual needs and common interests. It would ensure a healthy future and protect the planet.

During the Earth Summit, 1992 held in Rio (Brazil), there were three major agreements to be adopted aimed at changing the traditional approach to development which are:

- Agenda 21 — programme of action for global action in all areas of sustainable development;
- The Rio Declaration on Environment and Development — principles defining the rights and responsibilities of States;
- The Statement of Forest Principles — principles to underlie the sustainable management of forests worldwide.

In addition, two legally binding conventions were taken at the summit for signature which aimed at preventing global climate change and the eradication of the diversity of biological species, which were giving high profile to following efforts:

- The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, and
- The Convention on Biological Diversity.

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)

UNFCCC was one of the key outcomes of the Rio Earth Summit 1992, which is an international climate protection forum aiming to stabilise the concentration of heat-trapping Green House Gases (GHG). Stabilisation is at levels that will prevent dangerous interference with the climate system. In this direction the developed countries are to take significant measures in this area. They can help by reducing their emissions to 1990 levels by the year 2000. They should provide technology, finance and capacity building support to developing countries in this regard. In 1997, the convention was strengthened with a Kyoto Protocol, in which the developed countries took legally binding obligations. Their obligation was to cut their emissions by 5.2 per cent below 1990 levels by 2008–2012 in aggregate, as the first step towards much larger emission cuts in future. The developing countries, whose per capita emissions were just a fraction of developed countries, were not obliged to take binding emission reduction obligations. In 2007, the UNFCCC at its Thirteenth Conference of Parties (COP) adopted the Bali Road Map. The aim of this Conference was to push action on the shared vision, mitigation, adaptation, technology and financing. In 2009, the Copenhagen Accord was adopted by the parties to the Convention at the

fifteenth Conference of Parties (COP). It includes long-term goal of limiting average global temperature. It is to not more than 2 degree Celsius above of pre-industrial levels. This also attracted voluntary pledges for reduction of emission. In 2010, the Parties adopted Cancun Agreement. The agreement includes a comprehensive package to address the long-term challenge of climate change collectively by taking concrete action. In 2011, the meeting was held in Durban to draw up the blueprint for a fresh universal legal agreement. It was to deal with climate change beyond 2020. In 2012, the UN Climate Change Conference was held in Doha. In this conference, the governments consolidated the gains of the last three years of international climate change negotiations. The governments opened a gateway called Doha Climate Gateway for action on every levels for protection of environment.

In November 2013, the nineteenth session of the Conference of Parties was held in Warsaw. In this conference, a series of decisions were taken. The important decisions *inter-alia* were: (i) to evolve a draft text of the proposed new climate agreement, (ii) identification of information for Intended Nationally Determined Contributions, (iii) countries to close the pre 2020 ambition gap by intensifying their efforts, (iv) to establish Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage in order to provide most vulnerable population with better protection against the damage caused by extreme weather and rise of sea level, (v) to urge developed countries to provide more clarity on mobilising finance, (vi) establishment of Warsaw framework for Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation

in developing countries. In this conference, it was decided to invite all Parties to initiate domestic preparations for their intended nationally determined contributions. The same was without prejudice to the legal nature of the contributions. The other legal instrument with legal force was under the Convention applicable to all Parties towards achieving the objective of the Convention. It was also to communicate them well in advance of the COP-21.

During the period from 1–14 December 2014, the twentieth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP-20) of the United Nations Framework, Convention on Climate Change and Tenth Meeting of Parties to Kyoto Protocol took place in Lima, Peru. In this COP-20, it was decided that countries should not backslide from current pledges. This is relevant in view of the action of some countries which had gone back on their commitments of the Kyoto Protocol. The Lima (Peru) Conference urged that the contribution of countries has to be more than their present commitments. It was ensured that countries can include adaptation, finance, technology transfer, etc., also in their Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs) in addition to mitigation. During the period from 30 November to 12 December 2015, the 21st Conference of the Parties under United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change was held in Paris. The Minister for Environment, Forests and Climate Change in India led a delegation and advocated ambitious action based on the principle of common but differentiated responsibility (CBDR) that stresses the need for equity and fairness.

Paris Agreement on Climate Change, 2015

On 12 December 2015 in Paris, a historic agreement to combat climate change and investment towards a low carbon, resilient and sustainable future was agreed by 195 nations. The Paris Agreement for the first time brought all nations for common cause. The universal agreement's key aim is to keep a global temperature rise this century well below 2 degrees Celsius. It is to initiate efforts to limit the temperature increase even further to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. The 1.5 degree Celsius limit is a significantly safer defense line against the worst impacts of a changing climate. Besides, the agreement aims to strengthen the ability to deal with the impacts. To achieve these goals, appropriate financial flows will be put in place. It makes stronger action by developing countries. To protect the planet, the future generations will mark the 12 December 2015 as a date when responsibility, a shared humanity and a care for world took centre stage.

Salient features of the Paris Agreement inter-alia are as follows:

- Aim is not only achieving the objective of UNFCCC but also enhancing the implementation.
- Ideas of Climate Justice, Sustainable Lifestyles and Right to Development, which were specifically raised by India were explicitly recognised in the preamble.
- "Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective

Capabilities" were said in the agreement, capturing the notion of historical responsibility of the developed countries.

- Differentiated obligations based on annexes were not reflected in the agreement. However, differentiation across all elements was maintained for developed and developing countries.
- Developed Country Parties will undertake absolute emission reduction targets while Developing Country Parties will continue to enhance their mitigation efforts.
- The agreement not only includes Nationally Determined Contributions on mitigation but also has elements of adaptation, finance, technology transfer and capacity building.
- Developed Country Parties shall provide financial resources to assist Developing Country Parties.
- India's proposal to link transparency with capacity building initiative was agreed to.
- Article 2(1) (c) of the agreement states to make finance flows consistent with a pathway towards low greenhouse gas emissions. This was included despite opposition from India and other developing countries.

The Challenge of Climate Change for the Youth

The United Nations system recognises the key role of the youth in protecting

environment. The youth play a noteworthy role and work closely with youth organisations around the world. This initiative is taken through the United Nations Joint Framework Initiative on Children, Youth and Climate Change (Joint Framework Initiative). From 2008 the Joint Framework Initiative is coordinating efforts of 16 intergovernmental entities. In these steps many youth organisations give power to youth to take adaptation and mitigation actions and enhance their successful participation relating to climate change policy and processes. In the present scenario the youth of every nation have a good social and environmental awareness. Youth knowledge and efforts are a key to lead countries towards a resilient future. It is the need of the hour to actively engage youth and youngsters at national and global levels. Youth of today can create awareness in societies, run education programmes towards conserving our environment and promote renewable energy and can work towards environment-friendly practices.



It is quite true that youngsters globally should have a say for their future because of their creativity and youthfulness. Youth involvement and determination can make a noteworthy difference in avoiding the worst scenarios of climate change effects which can make significant impact on the policies of world leaders and citizens globally. Access to clean air, water, and a liveable climate are

inalienable human rights in the planet.

Today, India is facing the obstacle of sustaining its economic and commercial growth while simultaneously dealing with the problem of climate change. Climate change can have massive impact the economic life and may adversely impact the livelihood and the way of living of its people. In this regard, India's development is solely based on the priority of economic and social development and initiatives towards poverty reduction of its rural and urban masses. In this direction, India is playing a major role towards evolving processes and policies which will effectively deal with climate change effects and poverty eradication and improving the living standard of its citizens.

Initiatives of Good Practices Developed by Young People

The youth represents the most dynamic segment of the population and are the future of a nation. The young people's active participation for the success of all initiatives is indeed of crucial importance. On this account, the climate change initiatives are no exception to this and the youth involvement in the negotiations as well as its implementation is important.



Climate change is a cross-cutting issue, affecting not only the environment, but society, food, security, livelihood, natural resource base and disaster management. With development efforts linked to climate

change and it being a significant barrier to sustainable development, youth and youth organisations have an important role to play in tackling the effects of climate change. In particular, young people can contribute to efforts aimed at ensuring that new mechanisms are put in place for providing access to green technologies. Youth can also play a role in monitoring the implementation of specific programmes.

At all levels, the dialogue between youth and the policy makers should be promoted. There should be proper mechanisms to permit youth the access to information and the opportunity to present their views. The youth education represents one of the most effective tools to combat the destructive potential of climate change. It may cultivate an international understanding among members of the next generation since it is a long-term process that will impact an infinite number of future generations. Workshops may be organised at all levels for the youth to enable them to acquire knowledge about the climate change and the means to prevent it. There is a need to sensitise our younger generation in this matter. The responsibility of protecting the planet from the effects of climate change is on all of us, but the future of our initiatives depends largely on how well we associate the youth.

Initiatives to Tackle Climate Change

In addressing climate change by highlighting various domestic initiatives being embarked upon by the current government which inter-alia include the following:

- The Prime Minister's Council on Climate Change has been reconstituted to evolve a coordinated response on

climate change.

- The Government of India is taking pro-active steps on enhancing energy efficiency of renewable energy.
- New initiatives taken by the Government of India which include the ambitious target of generating 100,000 MW of solar energy, quadrupling of cess on coal for clean technologies, rapid afforestation through the Green India Mission and expansion in wind energy.
- A National Adaptation Fund for climate change has been established to finance concrete adaptation projects that are state driven and needs of the states.
- Our country has prepared a comprehensive National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC). The aim of this is to achieve sustainable development. Also since the launch of the NAPCC, there have been efforts to merge national programmes of action to regional and local levels consistent with varying socio-economic and ecological conditions. The National Action Plan on Climate Change identifies measures that promote our development objectives and addresses climate change efficiently.



In India, there are eight national missions which form the core of the National Action

Plan on Climate Change. These missions focus on multi-pronged, long-term and integrated strategies for achieving key goals in the context of climate change. Most of these programmes are already part of our current actions. They may need a change in direction and accelerated implementation of time-bound plans.

1. **National Solar Mission** aims to establish our country as a global leader in solar energy. It aims to increase the share of solar energy in the total energy mix, recognising the need to expand the scope of other renewable and non-fossil options.
2. **National Mission for Enhanced Energy Efficiency** aims to strengthen markets for energy efficiency by creating conducive regulatory and policy regime to set specific energy targets.
3. **National Mission on Sustainable Habitat** aims to make habitats sustainable through improvements in energy efficiency in buildings and management of solid waste.
4. **National Water Mission** aims to ensure integrated water resource management helping to conserve water, minimize wastage and ensure more equitable distribution.
5. **National Mission for Sustaining the Himalayan Ecosystem** aims to safeguard the Himalayan glaciers and mountain ecosystem.
6. **Green India Mission** aims to respond to climate change by a combination of adaptation and mitigation measures, which would help enhance carbon sinks in sustainably managed forests

and other ecosystems.

7. **National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture** aims to devise strategies to make Indian agriculture more resilient to climate change. It would develop new varieties of crops and especially thermal resistant crops and alternative cropping patterns. It would be capable of withstanding extremes of weather and variable moisture availability.
8. **National Mission on Strategic Knowledge for Climate Change** was launched with the objectives of mapping of the knowledge and data sources relevant to climate change. Also, it is positioned as a data sharing policy framework for building a strategic knowledge network among the various arms of the Government of India.

There is a project on Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM), which is under implementation in three coastal states—Gujarat, West Bengal and Odisha. At the national level, activities like high tide line mapping; delineation of ecologically sensitive areas like mangroves, coral reefs; sandunes; mud flats; salt, marshes, etc., have been completed.

The Government of India has launched a major effort to create '100 smart cities' in our country. The core objective of this effort is to design more efficient and liveable cities. As it may be said that compact and well-connected cities are not only cleaner and safer but also more economically productive.

India has chalked out ambitious plans and policies to tackle climate change. In this direction, the environmental issues reflect

India's strong will to address this global public good. In our country, the scarcity of resources and meeting the demands is a challenge for all of us. Therefore, as mandated under the UNFCCC, domestic momentum for addressing climate change also critically depends on multilateral negotiations and actual disbursement of long term finance and technology transfer from developed to developing countries.

International negotiations cannot be credible without the backing of national legislations. In the context of climate change, if there is a need to change the existing laws such as the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981, the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974 and the Wildlife Protection Act of 1972, the Parliament of India is the competent authority to bring about such amendments in the existing laws.

In May 2014, the Ministry of Environment and Forests was renamed as the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change. It reflects the importance attached by the Government of India to meet the challenge of climate change of the country and everywhere. In his 2014 Independence Day speech, the Prime Minister called for manufacturing sector to try and make products which have 'zero effect' or no adverse impact on the environment. The Government of India is also laying high priority to cleaning of rivers of the country. Some of the recent climate initiatives of the Government of India include:

- Augmenting of renewable energy targets to 175 GW by 2022.
- Increase in statutory cess on coal, peat and lignite (from ₹50 per tonne to

₹200 per metric tonne) to augment the National Clean Energy Fund (NCEF) set-up in 2010 for supporting projects, programmes and policies that promote clean energy technologies.

- Movement from a carbon subsidisation regime to carbon taxation regime – carbon tax equivalent of US\$ 60 per tonne of CO₂ in case of unbranded petrol and US\$ 42 per tonne in case of unbranded diesel.
- Massive afforestation plans with investment to the tune of USD 6 billion.
- Setting up of a National Adaptation Fund for Climate Change with a funding of around US\$ 18 million.
- Setting up of the National Institute on Climate Change.
- A sum of around US\$ 90 million has been allocated for setting up of the Ultra Mega Solar projects in five states.
- A sum of around US\$ 18 million has been allocated for the Ultra Super Critical Coal based Thermal Power Technology.
- A sum of around US\$ 72 million has been allocated for a new scheme aimed at solar power driven agricultural pump sets and water pumping stations.
- A sum of around US\$ 18 million has been allocated to develop 1 MW Solar Parks on the banks of canals.
- Our country's Intended Nationally Determined Contribution (INDC) was announced on 2 October 2015. The main elements of India's INDC include:

- To reduce the emissions intensity of its GDP by 33–35 per cent by 2030.
- To achieve about 40 per cent cumulative electric power installed capacity from non-fossil fuel based energy resources by 2030 with the help of transfer of technology and low cost international finance including from Green Climate Fund.
- To create an additional carbon sink of 2.5 to 3 billion tonnes of CO₂ equivalent through additional forest and tree cover by 2030 in the country.

of the sustainable development. There is need to ensure that development benefits reach to the poorest and most vulnerable section of our society. Millions of people are already being impacted by environmental degradation and climate change. The rise of sea levels in Small Island Developing States and agricultural stagnation is a serious concern for all. Its impacts are particularly acute for women, indigenous people and the elderly. Controlling greenhouse gas emissions and ecosystem resilience are fundamental for the growth of our future generations. We have only one planet and human kind must become accountable for the wanton destruction. Protecting our future on this planet also depends on harmonious living of our species.

Conclusion

The issue of protection of planet needs to be addressed within the background

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