



INDIA'S G-20 PRESIDENCY: CLIMATE CHANGE AGENDA

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Abstract

Global talks on the challenges of climate change have been dominated by concerns of climate change mitigation, with climate adaptation not being given the necessary attention. Similarly, climate finance flows to developing nations fall significantly short of their financial needs to undertake adequate and immediate climate action. India's G20 presidency will be expected to champion the cause of developing nations in coping with the climate crisis. Both developing and developed countries need to work in tandem to check carbon emissions. The developing world needs to formulate policies and roadmap to focus to reduce carbon emissions, while the developed nations need to provide funds and expertise for the same. India needs to build a bridge between developed and developing nations to forge consensus on climate change.

The phenomenon of climate change has amply been discussed at various international and multilateral forums since its first summit in February 1979. It still remains relevant and awaits policy imperatives by the developed and developing nations, the global North and South. Climate change is characterized by extreme weather patterns (such as temperature and precipitation) in the long run that threatens to affect food production. It is likely to have severe consequences like rise in sea levels, melting of glaciers, catastrophic flooding, forest fires, extreme heat or drought that may disturb the ecosystem, threaten animal life on the planet leading to humanitarian crisis. An adverse effect of climate change is global warming, which means progressive warming of the planet in the long run. Greenhouse-gas levels have skyrocketed over the last millennium. Such gases like carbon dioxide trap heat by enveloping the earth and remain in the atmosphere for many years. As they build up, the temperature of earth rises, resulting in an approximately 1°C rise in temperature,

which in turn may be detrimental to our environment, health-including basic necessities of life -pure air, water and food and safe shelter. This may lead to unprecedented consequences for life on this planet (Hastings Online).

A recent report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change indicates that food and water insecurity generated due to climate change is acute and the efforts to minimize or prevent its impact is uncoordinated and highly insufficient. The main challenge has been paucity of funds, which is only 10% of the requirement and even that is not reaching those small farmers, who are totally dependent on favorable climatic conditions. An estimate indicates that climate change impact has resulted in per day loss to the tune of \$200 million. Still the negotiators at COP 27 have yet not placed the adaptation finance on the agenda. Besides this, Covid-19 pandemic and prolonged Russian war with Ukraine has resulted in loss of thousands of lives and virtually destabilized many parts of the globe. This already has its impact on food and energy supplies across the globe.

The scale and complexity of the challenges that threaten human existence requires collective and concerted effort by all nations (Gupta, 2023). Amidst all this, the silver lining is that this year (2023) is significant for Asian leadership with respect to climate change. Asian countries would host some major summits, namely the G7 in Japan, G20 in India, and 28th UN Climate Conference in the UAE. These summits may draw some concrete roadmap to check climate change. The G20 nations wield significant power and influence. Scientists and the UN Secretary General have been warning G20 nations to take lead in curbing Green House Gas Emissions (GHGs).

In the backdrop, the G-20 Presidency of India (01 Dec 2022- 30 Nov 2023) is seen as an opportunity for the Global South to mainstream climate change agenda, especially climate financing and achieving sustainable development goals. The G20 found in 1999, is an intergovernmental forum of 19 nations and the European Union. Ever since, India took over the G-20 Presidency, since January 2023, it has been hosting meetings in various cities of the country. The final G-20 summit is scheduled to take place in New Delhi in September 2023, with a large delegation of 43 Heads of States set to participate in it (<https://www.oecd.org/g20/about/>). Hence the G-20 summit becomes critical in tackling global issues like climate change and arrive at consensus in charting a course of action to deal with it.

Environmentalists hold high expectations from India's G-20 Presidency, since the three major developing countries, including India, Indonesia and Brazil are part of grouping (Malhotra, 2023) and they have the power to decide the agenda. Moreover, the next Presidency of G-20 with one among the three-Brazil, who along with India can continue to keep the agenda of climate change on priority. Hence the role of developing nations within the G-20 is crucial to identify climate finance and energy transition partners and shift to green energy (Malhotra, 2023).

India has kept the theme of its G20 Presidency as 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' a Sanskrit phrase which implies "The world

is one single family". Hence each country needs to join to save the world for a safe future. The group wields considerable power and influence. Speaking at the inaugural session of the World Sustainable Development Summit 2023 held in New Delhi, Union Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Shri Bhupender Yadav, said "living in harmony with nature was traditionally imbibed in Indian ethos and the same reflected by mantra of LiFE or Lifestyle for Environment coined by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi". The mission aims at integrating both action at individual and national level aimed at leading a responsible and environmentally sustainable lifestyle. This has been widely acclaimed by leaders and experts worldwide. India's G20 Presidency is also said to have heralded a period of 'Amritkaal' commencing from India's 75th year of independence upto a period of 25 years (The Daily Star, Dec 01, 2022).

The holding of World Sustainable Development Summit 2023 in New Delhi, during India's G20 Presidency signals India's keenness to tackle the agenda of climate change, environment and sustainable development. Shri Yadav highlighted that Indian Government has been pro-active in creating policy frameworks and implementing it. He stressed that India is promoting projects in line with the circular economy. Regulations with regard to Plastic waste, E-waste, construction and demolition waste, metal recycling, energy saving measure etc. are already in place. The Indian Ministry of Science and Technology also organized a two-day Research and Innovation Initiative Gathering (RIIG) Conference of G-20 in Ranchi, Jharkhand on the theme 'Materials for Sustainable Energy' in early March 2023. The focus of the conference was innovation in science and technology, renewable energy resources, green energy and the environmental challenges faced in 21st century. India stressed on the need for joint collaboration among researchers and scientists of G20 nations to deal with global warming towards achievement of its commitment of net zero carbon emissions by 2070, as well as food and health security (AIR News, 2023). The message that emanates from such summits is to blend

economic development with environment conservation.

The same was echoed at the meeting of first Environment and Climate Sustainability Working Group meeting of G20 in Bengaluru on February 9-11, 2023. Extensive deliberations were held on issues related to environment and climate. The Working Group discussed issues such as checking soil degradation, ecosystem restoration, protecting and promoting biodiversity, climate sustainability, resilient marine economy, and resource efficient circular economy. Indian side emphasized that it is taking major initiatives to tackle adverse impact of climate change and global warming both at national and international level. Delegates from G20 countries also discussed speedy action on climate, addressed gap on role of mission LiFE in environment conservation. India has taken significant steps in this direction with a ban on single use plastic, promotion of circular economy. Its statistics of having 75 Ramsar wetland sites, 33 Elephant Reserve, 53 Tiger reserves, etc. successful reintroduction of cheetahs into India is a positive signal to other member countries to integrate sustainable development and climate resilience at the core of its actionable policy (PIB, 22 Feb 2023). Besides, India has pledged to reach net zero emissions of greenhouse gas by 2070. It has shored up its renewable energy capacity. The country is expected to take up the issue of checking carbon emissions, transition to green fuel, etc. technology upgradation, and managing finances for the same (Arasu, 2023). Shri R.K. Singh, India's Union Minister for Power and New and Renewable Energy urged G20 member states to collaborate to check the threats posed by climate change (Gupta, 2023).

In line with the promotion of Sustainable Development concept, India has also proposed construction of a G-20 park in Delhi on the theme of "One Earth, One Family, One Future." to serve as a representation of global unity on path of development. The sculptures in the park would be created using "waste to wonder" concept out of scrap and waste material sourced from the New Delhi Municipal Council's yards and other agencies (PBNS,

2023). The initiatives taken by India indicates its priorities on climate change and collaborative efforts to deal with it remains it agenda and unifying theme. Moreover, India has a separate "Finance Track" of G20 whose main theme is Sustainable Finance for the same purpose. In the same vein, S Jaishankar, India's External Affairs Minister stated that the G20 Presidency would look to establish a "Green Development Pact" at last week's virtual Global South Summit in order to chart out actions over the next decade. Analysts opine, transit to green energy would open up new job opportunities, clean environment, business options and also enable political leadership to take the credit of this transition for betterment of society at large. However, statistics indicate that India requires huge funds for energy transition. A recent report by International Forum for Environment, Sustainability and Technology (iFOREST) indicates that India requires at least \$ 900 billion over the next 30 years for a just energy transition in its two sectors- coal mines and thermal power plants (Gupta, 2023). Analysts believe, India would have to negotiate for more funds in this regard from developed to developing countries, may be as loan on attractive interest rates, if not as grants (Gupta, 2023). The Asian Development Bank has announced funding of \$6.7 billion towards climate mitigation and adaptation in 2022, and aims at providing \$100 billion in cumulative climate financing for the period of 2019–2030 (ADB, 2023).

As early as October 2022, Indian PM accompanied by the UN Secretary General had launched Mission LiFE (Lifestyle for Environment) an initiative for sustainable and healthy lifestyle. The Mission is characterized by a three-pronged strategy. One, it involves persuading individuals for behavioral changes leading to change in composition of demand; two, to encourage industry and market for prompt response to change in demand; three, policymakers to revisit their strategy to expedite sustainable consumption and production.

The G20 members nations, France, the UK, and Argentina have already extended their support to the mission and India can leverage its Presidency to win support of other group members (Langa, 2022). An assessment of all these initiatives taken and

implemented would be made at the annual summit of the UNFCCC or COP28 scheduled to be held in the UAE towards year end (2023). It would make an assessment of the initiatives taken (or the Global StockTake) by countries to meet the climate pledges made under the 2015 Paris Agreement. It would also analyse the extent to which the countries could do better in achieving it (Gupta, 2023). However, it requires huge funding, global collaboration strict adherence to a well formulated roadmap to curb GHGs emissions, technological support. Above all awareness creation among masses across the globe regarding the environmental and ecological crisis that the humans are heading towards is vital to tackle the global threat.

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