

## Environment Conservation in Climate Change Agreements: An Analysis

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### ABSTRACT

Climate change has turned into one of the scourging issue that humanity face in the informational and technological advanced world. Thereby, climate change resolution requires concerted global action by countries across the world and any effective response must be multilateral in nature because Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions in one part of the world affect the climate globally. Reducing GHGs became top priority of international community to mitigate and adapt climate change where they look upon greenery as an effective mechanism of carbon sink. Thus, this paper analyses the significant of environment conservation provisions posits in the climate change agreements and how India can make it as an opportunity in the midst of challenges.

**Keywords :** Climate change, UNFCCC, Paris agreement, Climate Finance.

### INTRODUCTION

Climate change has turned into one of the scourging issue that humanity face in the informational and technological advanced world. Thereby climate change resolution requires concerted global action by countries across the world and any effective response must be multilateral in nature because Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions in one part of the world affect the climate globally (Divya 2017, OECD 2018). International community believes that plummeting emissions of GHGs to a point where their concentration in the atmosphere can be stabilized at an agreed level would delay and ease adverse impacts of climate change on humanity as well as on natural environment (UNFCCC 2006). It has been assessed that since 1750, forests plus other vegetation but mainly forests, have been accountable for the natural sequestration of about half of the carbon emissions from the atmosphere. So, forests play a critical role in the mitigation of climate change by soaking up the carbon dioxide emanated into the atmosphere from human activities, primarily the burning of fossil fuels for energy and other purposes, into the terrestrial carbon sink (Duncan 2019).

At present, forests are used to mitigate climate change primarily in three ways:

1. Stopping deforestation i.e. ending the loss of forest area.

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2. Improving forest management and reducing forest degradation.

3. Allowing forests to grow back in areas that have been deforested.

The past efforts of afforestation aimed at establishing forests on land not previously forested; reforestation that is, renewing forest cover on previously forested land and forest restoration by improving forest condition, tree cover and carbon stocks are still significant in the mitigation and adaptation efforts (Richard *et al.* 2017). The carbon reservoir in the forest biomass as well as in soils is enormous which highlights the cruciality of conserving natural forest (Alain *et al.* 2003). Therefore, international community look upon forests as natural carbon sinks and as an effective mechanism for carbon sequestration.

#### **The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)**

By the late 1980s the United Nations convinced that ‘climate change affects humanity as a whole and should be confronted within a global framework, so as to take into account the vital interests of all mankind.’ In 1988, the United Nations General Assembly addressed the issue of climate change for the first time by adopting Resolution 43/53. It acknowledged that ‘climate change is a common concern of mankind, since climate is an essential condition which sustains life on earth’ and resolute that ‘necessary and timely action should be taken to deal with climate change within a global framework’. Besides, the same resolution constituted an Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) for the purpose of scientific study on climate change (UN General Assembly 1988). And in 1990 the United Nations General Assembly created an Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) for a Framework Convention on Climate Change through the Resolution 45/212 (UN General Assembly 1990). Later in 1992, the INC finalized the convention text and it has inked by the member states at the Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit (UNFCCC 2006). Since then, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) remains as the umbrella organization in the global efforts to extenuate climate change (Henk

2018). The nations that have ratified the UNFCCC came to known as ‘Parties to the Convention’ and ‘Parties’ agreed to annual meetings called ‘Conferences of the Parties’ (COP) which is responsible for postulating the functions and procedures to be used in accomplishing its objectives (Timothy *et al.* 2006).

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) has defined ‘Climate change’ as ‘a change of climate which is attributed directly or indirectly to human activity that alters the composition of the global atmosphere and which is in addition to natural climate variability observed over comparable time periods’ (United Nations 1992). UNFCCC sets forth the framework for international effort to mitigate climate change whose objective is ‘the stabilization of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system’ (Alain *et al.* 2003). Thus, the Convention in its Article 4.1(d) states: (1) All Parties, taking into account their common but differentiated responsibilities and their specific national and regional development priorities, objectives and circumstances, shall promote sustainable management and promote and cooperate in the conservation and enhancement, as appropriate, of sinks and reservoirs of all greenhouse gases not controlled by the Montreal Protocol, including biomass, forests and oceans as well as other terrestrial, coastal and marine ecosystems (United Nations 1992). That means, the UNFCCC put forward mainly two methods for the mitigation of climate change i.e. first, limiting emissions of anthropogenic greenhouse gases at their source and second, increasing removals by sinks (Leonel *et al.* 2019). In addition, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change agrees that the conservation as well as restoration of forests can considerably diminish emissions at a low cost and with potential co-benefits for adaptation plus sustainable development (Gert *et al.* 2007).

#### **Kyoto Protocol**

The most significant progress towards the mitigation of climate change was made during the Third Conference of the Parties (COP3) in 1997 which adopted the Kyoto Protocol as the first concrete stride in the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. The Kyoto

Protocol came into force on the 16 February 2005. The developed nations committed to reduce their emissions by an average of 5% below 1990 levels in the period 2008-2012. The Kyoto Protocol recommended quantified emission reduction goals for the major developed countries (Alain *et al.* 2003, Timothy *et al.* 2006). Article 3 (3) of the Kyoto Protocol ascertains the net changes in greenhouse gas emissions by sources and removals by sinks resulting from direct human-induced land-use change and forestry activities, limited to afforestation, reforestation and deforestation since 1990, measured as verifiable changes in carbon stocks in each commitment period, shall be used to meet the commitments under this Article of each Party included in Annex I (developed countries) (United Nations 1998, COP 2002). Thereby Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry Projects form a distinct category under the Kyoto Protocol as growing trees results in the sequestration of CO<sup>2</sup> (Timothy *et al.* 2006).

The Kyoto Protocol also offered alternatives to developed countries for domestic action through three 'flexible mechanisms' aimed at decreasing the cost of meeting emission targets such as Emissions Trading (ET), Joint Implementation (JI) and the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) (Alain *et al.* 2003). Among these mechanisms, the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) is a market based instrument to foster co-operation on afforestation along with reforestation between industrialized and developing countries (IUCN 2004). As a consequence, the CDM consents public and private entities from the industrialized countries (the Annex I Parties) to finance emission reduction activities in the developing countries (the non-Annex I Parties) (UNFCCC 2013).

### **Paris Agreement**

The Paris Agreement has signed on 12 December 2015 where countries adopted the international agreement to address climate change with an intention to hold the increase in global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels through voluntary emission reduction targets via Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC). The agreement entered into

force on 4 November 2016 and started in 2020 (Henk 2018, Pushpa *et al.* 2017).

Paris Agreement highlights the role forests and other carbon stores (known as 'sinks and reservoirs') in meeting global and national climate change mitigation goals. In particular, Article 5 of the agreement highlights the role of forests in combatting climate change (Peter 2016). According to Article 5 (1) Parties should take action to conserve and enhance, as appropriate, sinks and reservoirs of greenhouse gases as referred to in Article 4, paragraph 1(d), of the Convention, including forests and Article 5 (2) Parties are encouraged to take action to implement and support, including through results based payments, the existing framework as set out in related guidance and decisions already agreed under the Convention for: Policy approaches and positive incentives for activities relating to reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation and the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks in developing countries; and alternative policy approaches, such as joint mitigation and adaptation approaches for the integral and sustainable management of forests, while reaffirming the importance of incentivizing, as appropriate, non-carbon benefits associated with such approaches (United Nations 2015). By these references, the Paris Agreement encourages all Parties to utilize the full range of ecosystem based mitigation alternatives and the second paragraph of Article 5 focuses on reducing emissions through forest related activities in developing countries (Climate Focus 2015).

### **Financial Mechanisms**

The UNFCCC has established a financial mechanism to provide funds to help developing countries to implement the Convention. The Convention assigned the role of operating the financial mechanism to the Global Environment Facility (GEF), a multilateral financial institution. The GEF also managed newly created funds related to climate change and developing countries like the Special Climate Change Fund, the Least Developed Countries Fund and the Adaptation Fund. The different focal areas of the GEF permit the financing for forestry projects. The projects selected for GEF funding are implemented

by multilateral agencies such as:

The World Bank for investment projects,

The UNDP for technical assistance projects and institutional support,

The UNEP for projects involving capacity building, research and public awareness as well as regional development banks (Alain *et al.* 2003).

India has efficaciously retrieved climate finance from an array of international sources including climate specific facilities like the Clean Technology Fund, the Global Environmental Facility, multilateral organizations like the World Bank and Asian Development Bank, bilateral donors like Germany and Japan and the private sector through public and private banks. The funds are in form of budgetary allocations, taxes, subsidies, generation based incentives, private equity, loans, soft-loans and grants in which 'off budget' finances in form of direct project funding are managed by the private players and non-government organizations at the project level. Consequently, the funds from the international public sources have not always flow through budgets and many times funds are allocated directly to the projects operating on the ground, independently of the Indian public financial system and national priorities. So it is easy for the actors with their own interests, priorities and mandates to implement the projects as they wish. Thus, it is important to ensure that allocation of funds is more sensitive to the needs of the people, particularly the marginalized and vulnerable (Divya 2017).

## CONCLUSION

Global endeavours in the direction of mitigation and adaptation of climate change mainly surrounds around enhancing green cover mainly through afforestation, reforestation, restoration of forests, effective management of forests. Therefore, each of the climate change agreements has emphasised the adaptation and mitigation strives focussed on increasing forest cover and financial assistance for such efforts. India as country with geographical endowments has wide opportunity to channelize international finance for conservation efforts and this should be used for the upliftment of the marginalized section of the society. Otherwise opportunities of environment conservation with international finance will be a burden on India

by increasing under development by neglecting the rights of marginalized people. So India should harness opportunities of climate change mitigation for the development of its people.

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