

India's Global Position on Climate Change

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India has serious concerns because it already experiences the impact of climate change in low-lying areas, which are more vulnerable to inundation by water from sea level rise and increasingly severe storms. There is evidence of melt in Himalayan glaciers, water resources for much of Asia. Pachauri outlines some of the problems and the measures taken to minimize the damage.



Chairman Rajendra K. Pachauri and former U.S. Vice President Al Gore greet the public after accepting the Nobel Peace Prize jointly awarded to the IPCC and Gore for their work on climate change, December 2007.

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The subject of climate change is receiving considerable attention and eliciting widespread interest in India, particularly since the visit of Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in July 2009. India has been quite active on multilateral issues related to climate change, going back, in fact, to the period when the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was being negotiated prior to its completion in 1992. India has been reiterating the principle of “common but differentiated responsibility,” and its position as a country is often misunderstood on this account.

Indians are concerned about climate change because ours is a country that is particularly vulnerable to its impacts. With a coastline of 7,600 kilometers, for instance, it has to be worried about sea level rise. Some parts of the country, such as the Sundarbans across the Hooghly delta and the low-lying coastal area of Kutch on the western side, are particularly vulnerable to sea level rise, because even with a small increase in sea level, large parts of these locations would be threatened with major damage and destruction and with complete inundation, resulting from storm surges and cyclonic activity. In the Sundarbans, in particular, some islands have already disappeared and others are under similar threat.

The impacts of climate change on India would be diverse and serious. There is already evidence in some parts of the country of changes in precipitation patterns. While some parts of India show a perceptible decline in rainfall and there is reduced snow in the Himalayas, a major concern also arises from projected increases in the frequency and intensity of extreme precipitation events. These are not only likely to pose a major danger to those who would be affected directly, but they could also affect the livelihoods of hundreds of millions of small farmers, who are entirely dependent on rain-fed agriculture. India is also vulnerable to the increase in frequency, intensity, and duration of floods, droughts, and heat waves. Human health will be affected by climate change, not only on account of these occurrences but also as a result of increased vector-borne diseases. Another area of deep



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Extreme weather events — severe storms, floods, and drought — increasingly plague the Indian subcontinent. A villager crosses a parched landscape near Bhubaneswar during a widespread 2009 heat wave.

concern to Indian society stems from the impacts of climate change on agriculture. There is already growing evidence, on the basis of ongoing research, that some crop yields are declining on account of climate change. This trend will, of course, grow if global society is unable to mitigate the emissions of greenhouse gases adequately. India has a remarkably good record of agricultural progress, mainly as a result of the green revolution, but climate change poses a new challenge. The major objective of policy in the agricultural sector is to ensure adequate food and nutrition for 1.2 billion people today and a larger number in the next decade or two. Food security is, therefore, a major concern in this country.

India's response to the challenge of climate change can perhaps best be described by referring to the National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC), which actually consists of eight separate missions involving both mitigation and adaptation measures. As far as mitigation is concerned, the Solar Energy Mission, which has set a goal of 20,000 megawatts of solar capacity being installed by 2020, is clearly the most ambitious and progressive plan that could have been drawn up in this field. The impacts of climate change would, of course, seriously affect agriculture and availability of water, and the NAPCC will

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target adequate adaptation measures in both these areas.

In terms of cooperative relationships that India is trying to establish, the most promising would be in the field of joint technology development. However, India's position is that in keeping with the provisions and intent of the UNFCCC, finances should be provided for facilitating transfer of clean technologies, which in several cases would be far more expensive than conventional systems but would have lower levels of emissions and energy intensity. But the particular activity that would have great interest, not only for the Indian government but also for business as well as academic and research organizations in India, would be the possibility of collaborative research projects

between organizations in the United States and India. It is envisaged that with the substantially lower cost of scientific and technical manpower in India, even American business will find such an approach beneficial. Of course, intellectual property issues would need to be clearly

resolved in such activities, but since both countries are signatories to the World Trade Organization, this should not present a serious problem.

Overall, a strategic relationship between the United States and India to deal with the challenge of climate change would have benefits not only for the two countries

themselves but for the world as well by providing a model for similar arrangements between other developed and developing countries. India is also trying to promote collaborative ventures with the member nations of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, since they face similar challenges, as well as with the European Union (E.U.), which has a major program for funding technological developments involving organizations based in the E.U. and those in "third countries," such as India. ■

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