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Climate Change Diplomacy: India's Efforts and Agreements

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Abstract
In contemporary international relations Climate change diplomacy has become a defining feature as states negotiate mitigation, adaptation, finance, and technology transfer within an increasingly complex global governance architecture. India played pivotal role in this regime, balancing developmental imperatives, energy security, and poverty alleviation with growing international prospect for climate action. This paper offers a comprehensive analytical study of India's climate change diplomacy by examining its negotiating strategies, coalition politics, domestic–international linkages, and evolving role across key multilateral agreements from the UNFCCC and Kyoto Protocol to the Paris Agreement and post-Paris developments. Analysis on the basis of existing scholarly literature, policy documents, and recent developments, the study argues that India's climate diplomacy reflects a balanced position from a predominantly defensive posture to a proactive yet equity-centered engagement. Although India has demonstrated leadership through ambitious domestic and international initiatives along with partnerships, persistent challenges related to climate finance, technology transfer, and just transition continue to shape its negotiating stance. The paper concludes that India's emphasis on equity, CBDR–RC, and climate justice remains central to forging a more equitable, inclusive and credible global climate regime.

Keywords: Climate Change Diplomacy, UNFCCC, CBDR–RC, Paris Agreement, Global South, Climate Justice

INTRODUCTION

Climate change challenges confronting humanity in the twenty-first century, with far-reaching implications for environmental sustainability, economic development, social justice, and international security. The transboundary nature of climate change necessitates collective global action, making diplomacy an indispensable instrument for coordinating responses among sovereign states. Climate change diplomacy has therefore emerged as a critical arena within international relations, where competing national interests, ethical considerations, and power asymmetries overlap. For India, climate change diplomacy represents a complex balancing act between safeguarding developmental aspirations and responding to global imperatives for environmental sustainability. Most populous country with high vulnerability to climate impacts, dependent on climate-sensitive sectors, and significant development challenges, India's engagement with global climate negotiations has been shaped by concerns of equity, historical responsibility, and the right to development. India has consistently argued that climate action must not come at the cost of poverty eradication and economic growth, particularly for developing coun-

tries that have contributed least to historical greenhouse gas emissions.

India's early engagement in climate negotiations, particularly during the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) processes leading to the UNFCCC, was marked by strong advocacy for per capita equity and differentiated responsibilities through (CBDR–RC), which transform into the foundational architecture of global climate governance. Over time, however, changing global emission patterns alongwith geopolitical shifts have prompted a gradual evolution in India's diplomatic posture.

This systematic study seeks to provide a comprehensive analysis of India's climate change diplomacy via international agreements, coalition-building strategies, and the linkage between domestic and international climate actions commitments. It traces India's diplomatic trajectory from the Kyoto Protocol era to the Paris Agreement and beyond, highlighting both continuity and change in its negotiating positions. By situating India's climate diplomacy within broader debates on equity, development, and global governance, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the challenges and possibilities of achieving an equitable global response to climate change. Climate change diplomacy can be understood as the set of negotiation strategies, institutional engagements, and normative positions through which states seek to address climate change at the international level. It operates at the intersection of environmental governance and international relations, drawing upon multiple theoretical perspectives. From a realist standpoint, climate negotiations are arenas of strategic bargaining for national interests, economic growth, and energy security. Liberal institutionalism, by contrast, emphasizes the role of international institutions such as the UNFCCC in facilitating cooperation and coordination as well collective action on global public goods. Constructivist approaches highlight the importance of norms, ideas, and identities—such as equity, responsibility, and climate justice—in shaping state behavior and expectations. India's climate diplomacy reflects national interests and developmental priorities with minimum carbon footprints; it has also engaged actively with multilateral institutions and promoted normative principles such as CBDR–RC and equity. The power asymmetries embedded in global climate governance, particularly the unequal distribution of resources, technology, and decision-making authority between developed and developing countries.

This study adopts an integrated analytical framework to examine how India navigates the constraints and opportunities of the global climate regime with focusing on three key dimensions: (i) policies and principles, (ii) coalition politics and negotiation strategies, and (iii) domestic–international policy linkages.

Methodology

This study is based on secondary data obtained from newspapers, magazines, authoritative international sources, government publications, and journal articles.

Evolution of the Global Climate Regime

The global climate regime has evolved through several distinct phases, each characterized by different institutional arrangements and normative priorities. The adoption of the UNFCCC in 1992 marked the first major step toward a coordinated international response to climate change. The Convention established the principles of equity and CBDR–RC, recognizing the differentiated responsibilities of countries based on historical emissions and capacities. The Kyoto Protocol (1997) operationalized these principles by imposing legally binding emission reduction targets on developed (Annex I) countries while exempting developing (Non-Annex I) countries. However, the Protocol represented a landmark

developments and achievements in the post-Kyoto period with a more inclusive and flexible framework. The Paris Agreement (2015) marked a significant departure from the Kyoto model by adopting a bottom-up approach based on nationally determined contributions (NDCs). This framework sought to balance universality with differentiation, allowing countries to define their own mitigation pathways while collectively pursuing the goal of limiting global temperature rise.

India's engagement with these evolving frameworks reflects both continuity in its normative commitments, adaptation to changing global realities and a gradual transition from a defensive negotiating posture to a more solution-oriented engagement, while remaining anchored in climate justice concerns.

India's Climate Diplomacy: Early Phase and the Kyoto Era

India's climate diplomacy during the early phase of global climate negotiations was characterized by strong advocacy for equity and differentiation. During the INC negotiations, India emphasized per capita emissions as a fair basis for allocating responsibility, arguing that developed countries must take the lead in reducing emissions.

As a Non-Annex I country under the Kyoto Protocol, India opposed binding emission reduction targets for developing countries, citing concerns about economic growth and poverty alleviation. At the same time, India constructively engaged with market-based mechanisms such as the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), which provided opportunities for technology transfer and investment in sustainable development projects. India's ratification of the Kyoto Protocol exemplified its dual strategy of defending equity-based principles while participating pragmatically in institutional mechanisms that aligned with its development priorities. This period also saw India strengthen its alignment with developing country coalitions, particularly the G77 and China, to amplify its negotiating leverage.

Transition and Transformation: From Copenhagen to Paris

The Copenhagen Conference of 2009 exposed deep divisions between developed and developing countries, however, the Conference underscored the limitations of rigid differentiation and the need for a more flexible approach. In the subsequent negotiations, India played a key role in advocating bottom-up architecture based on NDCs under Paris agreement. This approach allowed India to commit to climate action on its own terms and conditions with financial and technological support. India's submission of its NDCs under the Paris Agreement reflected this balanced approach, focusing on emissions intensity reduction, renewable energy expansion, and the creation of carbon sinks. India consistently emphasized that these commitments were conditional and required international support. In the post-Paris era, India has increasingly positioned itself as a constructive leader despite global uncertainties, including the temporary withdrawal of the United States from the Paris Agreement. India's updated NDCs, long-term low-emission development strategy, and emphasis on lifestyle-based approaches such as LiFE (Lifestyle for Environment) continues to advocate strongly for climate finance, technology transfer, and a just transition for developing countries.

Coalition Politics and India's Leadership Role

India's early engagement with environmental issues was framed by its developmental challenges and widespread poverty. At the 1972 Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi articulated a landmark position by linking environmental protection with poverty

eradication, emphasizing that environmental degradation in developing countries was often a consequence of underdevelopment rather than overconsumption. This articulation laid the intellectual foundation for India's later climate diplomacy by foregrounding development as a central concern. Coalition politics has been central to India's climate diplomacy. Through sustained engagement with groupings such as the G77, BASIC, and LMDC, India has amplified the collective voice of the Global South and resisted attempts to dilute differentiation within the climate regime.

India's leadership within these coalitions reflects its ability to bridge diverse interests, from least developed countries to emerging economies. Initiatives such as the International Solar Alliance further demonstrate India's efforts to promote South–South cooperation and renewable energy partnerships.

Domestic Climate Policies and International Credibility

India's international climate diplomacy is closely linked to its domestic policy initiatives. Efforts to expand renewable energy capacity, improve energy efficiency, and promote sustainable lifestyles have strengthened India's credibility in global negotiations. Over the past decade, India has sought to project itself as a responsible yet equity-conscious actor by integrating climate objectives into national development planning while resisting externally imposed constraints. Moreover, by emphasizing on adaptation and climate resilience reflects its vulnerability to climate impacts and strengthens its normative credibility as a voice for the Global South. Policies addressing water security, climate-resilient agriculture, disaster risk reduction, and coastal management underscore India's advocacy for balancing mitigation with adaptation. By prioritizing adaptation in domestic planning, India reinforces its international arguments for increased climate finance and support for vulnerable countries.

The announcement of the Panchamrit pledges at COP26 symbolized India's willingness to contribute meaningfully to global climate goals while maintaining a differentiated and development-oriented approach. At COP27 (2022), India advocated for the phase-down of all fossil fuels, extending the focus beyond coal alone. This proposal drew significant international attention and indicated an evolving position in India's approach to the global energy transition. India's emphasis on a "phase-down" strategy represents a calculated stance in climate negotiations, underscoring its call for an equitable global framework that accommodates varying levels of development among countries. Simultaneously, India's domestic policy initiatives demonstrate a measured yet firm commitment to transitioning towards a cleaner and more sustainable energy system. Initiatives such as the International Solar Alliance (ISA) and the Leadership Group for Industry Transition (LeadIT) illustrate how domestic expertise is translated into international partnerships. These efforts enhance India's soft power by projecting it as a solutions-oriented actor rather than a passive rule-taker in the climate regime. Energy efficiency initiatives, particularly in industry and transport, have reinforced India's mitigation credentials. Market-based mechanisms such as the Perform, Achieve, and Trade (PAT) scheme demonstrate India's capacity to design innovative policy tools compatible with economic growth. These domestic actions have enhanced India's ability to influence negotiations not only through normative arguments but also through demonstrable implementation capacity.

Challenges and Constraints

Despite significant progress, India's climate diplomacy faces several challenges. Persistent gaps in climate finance, limited access to advanced technologies, and concerns about a just transition remain key constraints. Delays in state-level execution, infrastructural constraints, and socio-economic trade-offs

complicate the realization of policy goals. Internationally, India must navigate skepticism from developed countries while maintaining trust among developing nations that its leadership does not dilute equity-based principles.

Additionally, balancing rapid economic growth with decarbonization poses ongoing challenges. Geopolitical tensions and shifting power dynamics further complicate negotiations, underscoring the need for continued advocacy for equity and multilateral cooperation.

Future Prospects of India's Climate Diplomacy

Looking ahead, India's climate diplomacy is likely to play an increasingly influential role in shaping global climate governance. India is likely to intensify its advocacy for predictable, adequate, and accessible finance for mitigation, adaptation, and loss and damage. By foregrounding the principles of equity and Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities (CBDR-RC), India can act as a bridge between developed and developing countries, pushing for reforms in multilateral development banks, enhanced capitalization of climate funds, and simplified access mechanisms for vulnerable nations. Future climate diplomacy is likely to see India deepen South–South and triangular cooperation as an alternative pathway to climate leadership. Platforms such as the International Solar Alliance (ISA), the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI), and emerging green hydrogen partnerships offer opportunities for India to export policy expertise, technology solutions, and institutional models. These initiatives allow India to project itself as a solution provider rather than merely a negotiator, enhancing its soft power and strategic influence.

Such partnerships may also enable India to leverage climate cooperation as a tool of regional stability, particularly in South Asia and the Indian Ocean region, through cross-border renewable energy trade, climate-resilient infrastructure development, and shared adaptation strategies. India has the potential to contribute constructively to a more inclusive climate regime.

Conclusion

India's climate change diplomacy reflects a nuanced and evolving engagement with the global climate regime. Rooted in principles of equity, CBDR–RC, and climate justice, India has sought to protect its developmental interests while adapting to changing global expectations. Through strategic coalition-building, domestic policy innovation, and constructive participation in multilateral negotiations, India has emerged as a key player in shaping the international response to climate change.

Future climate diplomacy is likely to see India deepen South–South and triangular cooperation as an alternative pathway to climate leadership. Platforms such as the International Solar Alliance (ISA), the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI), and emerging green hydrogen partnerships offer opportunities for India to export policy expertise, technology solutions, and institutional models. These initiatives allow India to project itself as a solution provider rather than merely a negotiator, enhancing its soft power and strategic influence. Such partnerships may also enable India to leverage climate cooperation as a tool of regional stability, particularly in South Asia and the Indian Ocean region, through cross-border renewable energy trade, climate-resilient infrastructure development, and shared adaptation strategies.

While challenges related to finance, technology, and implementation persist, India's experience underscores the importance of flexibility, inclusivity, and cooperation in addressing climate change. As the global community moves toward enhanced ambition, India's emphasis on equitable and development

-oriented pathways offers valuable insights for building a legitimate and effective climate governance framework.

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