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ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENTS IN COMBATING CLIMATE CHANGE: INDIA'S PERSPECTIVE

AUTHORED BY - VEER SHARMA

Introduction

Climate change poses one of the most pressing challenges to global environmental stability, economic growth, and human well-being. Its impacts are felt across borders, making international cooperation essential. Over the years, various international agreements have emerged to coordinate global efforts in addressing climate change. For India, a developing country with growing energy needs and significant vulnerability to climate impacts, such agreements are not just policy tools but also frameworks to balance development with sustainability. India's perspective on these agreements is rooted in the principles of equity, common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR), and sustainable development.

1. Importance of International Agreements in Addressing Climate Change

International agreements on climate change, such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Kyoto Protocol, and the Paris Agreement, serve multiple purposes:

Set global emissions reduction targets.

Establish financial and technological support mechanisms.

Promote climate resilience and adaptation.

Facilitate cooperation among countries through transparency and accountability.

Encourage the transfer of climate-friendly technology and capacity building.

These agreements recognize the historical responsibility of developed nations and acknowledge the development needs of countries like India, which contributes only around 4% of global emissions but remains highly vulnerable to climate risks.

2. India's Role in Major International Climate Agreements

a. UNFCCC (1992)

India signed and ratified the UNFCCC, which laid the groundwork for subsequent climate negotiations. The Convention emphasized CBDR—a principle India strongly advocates. It established that while climate change is a common concern, developed nations bear a greater burden due to their historical emissions.

b. Kyoto Protocol (1997)

Under the Kyoto Protocol, binding emission reduction targets were set for developed countries during its first commitment period (2008–2012). India, classified as a non-Annex I country, was not obliged to cut emissions but supported global mitigation efforts through mechanisms like the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM). Through CDM, India hosted numerous renewable energy and energy efficiency projects that attracted foreign investment and technological expertise.

c. Paris Agreement (2015)

The Paris Agreement marked a shift toward universal responsibility, where all countries—developed and developing—pledged to combat climate change through Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). India's NDCs include:

Reducing emissions intensity of GDP by 33–35% by 2030 (compared to 2005 levels).

Achieving 40% of cumulative electric power capacity from non-fossil fuel-based energy sources.

Creating additional carbon sinks through afforestation.

India ratified the Paris Agreement in October 2016, reaffirming its commitment to global climate action while ensuring that climate goals do not hinder national development priorities.

3. India's Domestic Climate Actions in Response to International Agreements

India has taken proactive steps to translate international commitments into national action:

a. National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC):

Launched in 2008, NAPCC outlines eight national missions focusing on solar energy, energy efficiency, sustainable agriculture, and water conservation. It is aligned with India's international obligations.

b. State Action Plans on Climate Change (SAPCCs):

States have developed climate action plans to address region-specific vulnerabilities and mitigation strategies, in line with the NAPCC and international commitments.

c. Renewable Energy Development:

India is investing heavily in renewable energy, targeting 500 GW of non-fossil fuel-based capacity by 2030. It is a founding member of the International Solar Alliance (ISA), promoting solar energy deployment in tropical countries.

d. Electric Mobility and Energy Efficiency:

Initiatives like FAME (Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Hybrid and Electric Vehicles) and Perform, Achieve and Trade (PAT) schemes aim to reduce emissions intensity.

4. Challenges Faced by India in Implementing Climate Commitments

Despite its progress, India faces several challenges:

a. Development vs. Environment Trade-off:

India must balance rapid economic growth and poverty alleviation with environmental sustainability. Over-dependence on coal for energy generation remains a concern.

b. Financial Constraints:

Transitioning to a low-carbon economy requires massive investment. Though international agreements promise financial aid (e.g., \$100 billion annual climate finance by developed countries), actual disbursement remains inadequate and unpredictable.

c. Technology Access:

Limited access to advanced, affordable, and appropriate green technologies hinders faster adoption, despite international frameworks promoting technology transfer.

d. Climate Vulnerability:

India is highly susceptible to climate-induced events like floods, droughts, and heatwaves. Adaptation measures require strong institutional support, community engagement, and scientific planning.

5. India's Diplomatic and Global Leadership

India has emerged as a responsible and constructive player in international climate diplomacy:

a. Leadership in Global Forums:

India advocates for climate justice, equity, and sustainable lifestyles. At COP26 in Glasgow, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced the Panchamrit strategy—five major climate commitments, including net-zero emissions by 2070.

b. International Solar Alliance (ISA):

Launched with France, ISA promotes solar power development, particularly in developing countries. It reflects India's intent to lead by example.

c. Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI):

This India-led initiative focuses on building infrastructure resilient to climate disasters, further strengthening global adaptation efforts.

d. G20 and BRICS Engagements:

India actively incorporates climate concerns in multilateral platforms, pushing for green finance, carbon markets, and inclusive energy transitions.

6. The Way Forward

India's continued engagement with international climate agreements must be complemented by:

Stronger implementation of NDCs with regular monitoring and capacity building.

Increased public and private sector collaboration for funding green technologies.

Enhanced climate education and awareness to drive behavioral change.

Robust climate data and forecasting systems to improve adaptation and disaster management.

Equity-based negotiations at global forums, ensuring fair representation and support for developing countries.

Conclusion

International agreements are crucial in shaping collective climate action, and India plays a pivotal role in upholding and advancing their goals. While India faces domestic constraints, its strategic vision, diplomatic initiatives, and ambitious policy frameworks show its commitment

to a greener and more resilient future. From supporting solar alliances to pledging net-zero emissions, India demonstrates that international cooperation, backed by national resolve, can lead the world toward sustainable development. Through a balanced, equity-driven approach, India continues to advocate for climate justice while pursuing its developmental aspirations.

