



# The politics of climate change in India: narratives of equity and cobenefits

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India occupies an intriguing dual position in global climate politics—a poor and developing economy with low levels of historical and per capita emissions, and a large and rapidly growing economy with rising emissions. Indian climate politics has substantially been shaped around the first perspective, and increasingly, under international pressure, is being forced to grapple with the second. This review of Indian climate politics examines the initial crystallization of Indian climate positions and its roots in national climate politics, and then examines the modest ways in which climate politics have been revisited in domestic debates since about 2007. Following elucidation of these themes, the article turns to a discussion of new directions for Indian climate policy and their moorings in domestic climate politics. © 2013 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

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## INTRODUCTION

India occupies an intriguing dual position in global climate politics. As a developing economy with a substantial poverty problem and low levels of historical and per capita emissions, India is both likely to face considerable impacts and has limited capacity to address the problem. As a large country and one that has transitioned into a rapidly growing economy, India is called on to participate actively in addressing the global climate challenge. Indian climate politics has substantially been shaped around the first perspective, and increasingly, under international pressure, is being forced to grapple with the second.

In making this transition, discussion of climate change has also shifted from being a narrow subset of Indian foreign and diplomatic policy, one that was almost exclusively the preservation of negotiators and diplomats, to a broader debate on whether and how development trajectories should internalize climate mitigation and adaptation goals. In the course of making this shift, a far broader swathe of India society—business, media, state bureaucrats,

environmentalists—have been drawn into the climate debate. While debate has been joined, there are by no means clear answers. The result is a sprawling apparatus of domestic climate policy which is yet to fully be put in place, let alone assessed.

This review of Indian climate politics first examines the initial crystallization of Indian climate positions and its roots in national climate politics. It then turns to an examination of the ways in which climate politics have been revisited in domestic debates since about 2007. Central themes are the consistency of an equity frame for Indian climate politics, and the recent emergence of the idea of ‘cobenefits’-based actions that deliver both development and climate gains. While this latter formulation is driving domestic policies, it is not, as yet, providing a basis for re-thinking India’s international negotiating position. A third section discusses new directions for Indian climate policy and their moorings in domestic climate politics.

## TRACING THE ARC OF INDIAN CLIMATE POLITICS: THE CENTRALITY OF EQUITY NARRATIVES

Indian climate politics is, in large part, a story of remarkable continuity. The dominant frame of

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'climate equity'—understood predominantly in a North–South contest around dividing up a global commons—was established relatively early. This frame has also had the effect of shaping climate politics around engagement with the international negotiation context, insulating Indian domestic political and policy spaces from considering climate concerns. This section examines the crystallization of the equity and climate change narrative, the reasons for its continuity over time, and the partial ways in which that narrative has been modified and questioned in recent years.

### Establishing the Frame

From its opening line, the Centre for Science and Environment's (CSE) evocatively titled 'Global Warming in an Unequal World' sets the stage for and foreshadows the first two decades of Indian climate politics: 'The idea that India and China must share the blame for heating up the earth and destabilizing its climate... is an excellent example of environmental colonialism.'<sup>1</sup> Reacting to a report from the Washington DC based World Resources Institute (WRI),<sup>2</sup> Agarwal and Narain make three points that remain central to contemporary Indian understandings of the climate debate: contribution to stocks of greenhouse gas emissions, rather than annual flows of emissions, constitutes the appropriate metric for assessing responsibility for causing climate change; a per capita allocation of global sinks is the only morally defensible metric, and that a distinction should appropriately be made between 'survival emissions' of the poor and 'luxury emissions' of the rich.

Voices such as CSEs were particularly important in the early days of the climate negotiations, when the government of India and the Ministry of Environment and Forests in particular were new to the issue.<sup>3</sup> An early scholarly treatment of India's negotiating position suggests that while per capita-based formulations of equity were part of the government's thinking at the time, the CSE report 'encouraged' the government to adopt the idea.<sup>4</sup> One important reason for adopting this perspective was that it was broadly shared among others active in the debate. For example, another major and influential think-tank, the (then) Tata Energy Research Institute (TERI), while adopting a less strident and more behind the scenes approach, also undertook a critique of the WRI report.<sup>5</sup> Among those engaged in the debate within India, there was broad agreement on the possible negative impacts of climate change on India, the possible constraining effect of a climate treaty, and the need for India to insist that industrialized countries must be held responsible for their emissions.<sup>3</sup>

The substantive agreement between these two non-governmental heavy-weights contributed to a broader national consensus. Thus, at the outset of substantive negotiations in 1991, India's delegation leader had stated: 'The problem... is caused not by emissions of greenhouse gases as such but by *excessive levels* of per capita emissions of those gases... It follows, therefore, that developed countries with high per capita emission levels are responsible for incremental global warming... the principle of equity should be the touchstone for judging any proposal'.<sup>6</sup>

By the conclusion of the process, India had played a substantial role in shaping a position of the global South along these lines through coalition diplomacy and careful textual work. For example, building on the ideas articulated above, India modified the IPCC's formulation of 'common responsibilities' across countries to 'common but differentiated responsibilities' reflecting the importance India placed on appropriately allocating responsibility across countries for causing the problem and hence for action.<sup>7</sup> India also played a leading role in calling for new and additional funding and for creation of a separate institutional mechanism for climate funding.<sup>3</sup>

It is important to locate these positions in the context within which they were forged.<sup>8</sup> In the early 1990s, there was a groundswell of optimism regarding global cooperation on environmental problems, fueled largely by the success of the Montreal Protocol. At the same time, perspectives on global environmental issues were not innocent of two decades of tension over economic cooperation, heightened by a decade of structural adjustment in the 1980s. Developing countries made little headway in shaping mechanisms for global economic cooperation during this period, and with consequent diminished faith in the global system. As a consensus building device, 'sustainable development' at best papered over these cracks; there remained concern in developing countries that environmental objectives would limit growth. A firewall built around 'differentiation' between north and south, with a corresponding set of financial obligations was seen as the minimum necessary to allay developing country concerns.

### Half a Toe in the Water: The CDM

India's engagement with the clean development mechanism (CDM) represents a relatively minor modification from the established frame of Indian climate politics. But it also shows how Indian climate politics is formed in continual dialogue with global discussions. In keeping with India's avowed position of keeping the pressure on industrialized countries

for mitigation action, India's initial reaction to CDM (then 'Activities Implemented Jointly') was one of skepticism, informed by a view that CDM would be a way for developed countries to get developing countries to get the work done at minimum expense.<sup>7</sup>

Within a few years, however, the perspective changed, driven by new actors who crafted a new understanding of the mechanism. The Confederation of Indian Industries (CII), a leading industry association, advocated India's participation in the CDM and in its institutional design.<sup>6</sup> This advocacy by CII was also given heft by academic research on the subject undertaken by influential non-governmental organizations such as TERI.<sup>3</sup> An acceptance and even embrace of CDM was made possible by re-interpreting CDM as consistent with a contractual frame for action that India had been advocating—India would take on mitigation commitments only when they were financially supported to do so.<sup>7</sup>

India rapidly became a leader in generating CDM projects, accounting for 53% of projects generated globally in 2005, although more recently India has been substantially outpaced by China.<sup>9</sup> CDM therefore created an important constituency for direct engagement with one aspect of the global climate regime—Indian business—with potential implications for domestic politics of climate change. However, it is important not to overstate the case; Indian business remains surprisingly disengaged and fragmented in its engagement with climate politics.

## Revisiting the Frame

The early framing of Indian climate politics has proved to be remarkably durable, leading to a consistent negotiating position over two decades. This international stance also informed domestic climate politics: climate change is an issue of north–south global contestation; India should use the international process to hold industrialized countries to account; and the issue of climate change is relatively irrelevant to domestic politics. Atteridge attributes this consistency in part to personalities—the role of a small number of senior bureaucrats operating in comparative isolation from other foreign policy influence—and to the dominance of the equity frame.<sup>10</sup> However, while partially correct, this explanation, by itself is insufficient to explain consistency in Indian climate politics. It is also necessary to explore the continued basis for public support for the equity frame (or at least the absence of active disagreement).

Acceptance of the equity frame has been widespread during the two decades of the UNFCCC process. Significantly, this consensus included technical and professional participants in the global climate

debate, who could have been expected to be more aware of climate impacts. Indeed, interviews with such experts reported that they found participation in international assessments a 'waste of time' because political action is seen as industrialized countries' responsibility.<sup>11</sup> Kandlikar and Sagar note that the dominant framing of the problem as a collective global problem innocent of past responsibility further alienates southern researchers who view the problem through an equity lens.<sup>12</sup> Beyond researchers, Indian environmental activists have also historically approached the climate agenda with skepticism and as a distraction from local environmental problems.<sup>13</sup> Beyond the importance of personalities, the climate equity frame and its supporting arguments have retained strong resonance across many sections of the Indian polity, notably among those most directly working on the subject and most engaged with framing climate politics in India.

This relatively monolithic political stance has developed multiple and contending strands in recent years for a variety of reasons. Most significant, the global climate negotiating context has changed. In the build up to the conclusion of the first commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol, large developing countries were placed under growing pressure at a succession of Conference of Parties from Bali (2007) onwards to articulate formulations for and the conditions under which they would accept climate mitigation responsibilities.<sup>14–16</sup> The various formulations debated over time, such as 'sustainable development policies and measures', 'nationally appropriate mitigation actions', and greenhouse gas intensity targets all force engagement with what countries are willing to do within their borders. India has had to perforce engage this question.

In addition, the global geopolitical context has changed considerably since the early 1990s in ways that are highly relevant to India.<sup>7</sup> Along with other rapidly industrializing countries, India has benefited from several years of high economic growth through a period of global economic slowdown, and is more assertively claiming a seat at the global high table. In the climate talks, this assertion has been facilitated by formation of the 'BASIC' bloc of countries (Brazil, India, South Africa, and China). Significantly, in terms of per capita indicators of economic progress or greenhouse gas emissions, India has more in common with least developed countries than with the emerging rapidly industrializing economies, but through its own negotiation strategies and external perception tends to be increasingly identified with the latter rather than with the former,<sup>17</sup> a point that has aroused criticism from long-standing allies in the G77 such as

Bangladesh.<sup>18</sup> India's own foreign policy compulsions, such as negotiation of the Indo-US nuclear deal, have led to pressures for climate change positions to be more closely aligned with broader foreign policy.<sup>19</sup> These global shifts, as the next section describes, have interacted with domestic changes in India to lead to greater nuance in the articulation of the equity frame, without changing adherence to its underlying principles.

## INDIAN CLIMATE POLITICS REVISITED

In the period surrounding the Copenhagen COP in 2009, the government issued several statements and pronouncements, including a commitment to limit India's emissions per capita to the average levels of industrialized countries, an emission intensity pledge prior to Copenhagen, and a National Action Plan on Climate Change (which are discussed later in this review). Several commentators have noted and applauded these measures, and sought to interpret them as part of a larger shift in India's climate policy and politics.<sup>20,21</sup> While there have undoubtedly been interesting developments, to a substantial extent the perception of a sea-change is overdrawn. While India has indeed kept pace with declarations of intent from other developing countries notably the Copenhagen pledge—and instituted some far-reaching domestic programmes, it would be incorrect to read from this a fundamental shift in domestic politics of climate change in India. In part, the change in global messaging was driven by personality politics in the form of the then incumbent Minister of Environment and Forests, Jairam Ramesh.<sup>7</sup> Beyond this, however, the domestic political story is a subtle, incomplete, and contested shift in emphasis and framing. Here, I explore this shift as it is manifested first in debates among various sectors of Indian political society, and then with reference to particular key themes that have emerged in the Indian climate debate.

### Domestic Constituencies

Climate change has historically been a nonissue in Indian organized politics given pressing short-term domestic concerns of poverty, provision of basic services, and economic management, this seems unlikely to change. As a former Minister of Environment and Forests puts it: 'Climate change as an issue is not a constituency mover'.<sup>22</sup> At the same time, the issue of climate change has received growing attention within the organized political system, albeit within the existing framing. Highly instructive are two debates in Parliament held before and after the

Copenhagen COP.<sup>22</sup> The Lok Sabha or lower house debate signaled an acceptance of the seriousness of climate change as a problem, some discussion of local impacts, and a clear and repeated articulation of developed country responsibility for action. The post-Copenhagen debate in the Rajya Sabha (upper house) focused almost exclusively on climate change as an issue of foreign policy, and specifically on whether the government had adhered sufficiently firmly to its 'red lines', the objective of which were to ensure that India does not subject itself to obligations that limit growth and development. Notably, there was not a single speaker who explored whether the Copenhagen Accord sufficiently addressed the challenge of climate change. India's interests were entirely constructed in terms of national space for development and not around an effective global climate agreement. However, some attention to local impacts by elected Parliamentarians provides an indication, however mild, of a trend toward engagement with the issue in ways directly relevant to local constituents.

In another barometer of national politics, coverage of climate change in the media has been steadily increasing, although existing studies are limited to the English language print media alone.<sup>23,24</sup> In a study of English newspapers from September 2009 to March 2010, Jogesh found that global climate politics dominated the coverage (57%) while domestic politics and policies (which also included intrigue about the composition of India's negotiating team) accounted for 21% of coverage. Climate science and business stories accounted for 10% and 5%, respectively. These data suggest the continued dominance of the international negotiating process in climate coverage. However, there were some opinion pieces that noted emerging economy emissions can no longer be entirely ignored in a global negotiation process, although these were outnumbered by opinion pieces that argued the problem is caused entirely by industrialized countries. A common perspective was that emerging economies should indeed do more, but in the context of leadership for action from industrialized countries and when they are supported to do so through finance and capacity. Taken collectively, the trends suggest a continued dominance of the international process in media representations of climate change and a conviction in the responsibility of industrialized countries to lead action, along with some indications of conditional consideration to domestic policy and action.

These conclusions on climate change in formal politics and in Indian media bears explanation when juxtaposed against arguably the most robust public opinion survey on Indian perspectives on climate



change, conducted in 2011 (released in 2012) by a research group at Yale University.<sup>25</sup> A substantial majority of respondents reported observations of a changed climate—in terms of rainfall variation or frequency of hot days—and a perception of substantial vulnerability to likely impacts such as droughts and floods. Moreover, 41% of respondents said the government should be ‘doing more’ to address climate change and 54% said India should be making a large or moderate effort to do so, even if it has large or moderate costs. Interpretation of these results is, however, somewhat confounded by another finding that 41% had never heard of global warming and only 7% reported knowing ‘a lot’ about the topic. This last result suggests that engagement with climate change as an issue remains limited to a very thin slice of the population. It is unclear if the earlier findings, particularly on support for strong Indian mitigation policies, would persist if there was broader familiarity with the domestic debate, including the equity frame.

One approach to better understanding political currents on climate change is to explore the perspectives of key constituencies that might be opinion shapers on climate change. Indian environmental researchers and activists, for example, would appear to be a natural constituency for robust support of national mitigation action. However, Indian environmentalists’ perspectives have been largely moulded by a broader idea of Southern environmentalism as inextricably tied to concerns of equity.<sup>13</sup> This leads them to align with, indeed forge as in the case of CSE, the dominant national narrative on industrialized country responsibility and per capita-based allocations of carbon space. Moreover, environmentalists have been concerned that domestic environmental agendas risk being subverted by the climate agenda with problematic consequences, such as a climate-driven policy tilt toward nuclear power or plantation forestry, both issues of contention in Indian environmentalism.<sup>26</sup> More recently, there has been a slow progression from this perspective toward one that sees value in integrating climate change into a broader environmentalism in a manner that simultaneously takes seriously justice, local environment and development agendas, and climate science.<sup>13,26</sup>

Efforts to achieve such a synthesis that combines the equity frame with one of local mitigation action in India are acquiring wider salience. In one instance, a broad coalition of trade unions, peoples’ organizations, social movements, and other self-identified progressive individuals sent a collective memorandum to the Prime Minister and the Environment Minister in the build up to Copenhagen. They called for a shift in India’s approach to

climate change by declaring climate change a global emergency, demanded sharp emission cuts by the North and payment of ecological debt, and actions by large developing countries including India to shift away from a high consumption and emissions path by agreeing to mitigation targets backed by national legislation.<sup>27</sup> In another example, a statement by a youth coalition, the Indian Youth Climate Network, includes in its manifesto an emphasis on climate mitigation, a transition to a low carbon future, energy access, and climate equity.<sup>28</sup>

Another study suggests that cross-sectoral networks around climate change, for example networks of municipalities, of national and international NGOs and of regional NGOs have also begun working toward integrating their work with climate objectives.<sup>29</sup> These networks typically operate by attaching their favored solution to climate change, in an effort to derive benefit from the growing relevance of the climate problem. However, in an illustration of the continued hold of the central framing of climate change in India, these networks constrain themselves to maintain consistency with the dominant national frame, and often bump up against the insistence on a continued divide between national and international policy on climate change. For example, during a set of regional hearings on climate impacts, a regional network steered clear of direct critique of the government of India, in favor of maintaining a larger Southern solidarity for the international process.

The Indian business community has only recently woken up to the issue of climate change, but in partial and fragmented ways. In 1998, one observer described industry as ‘unmobilized and uninvited’.<sup>3</sup> As described above, the business community then took a limited interest in the CDM process. However, the trend does appear to be toward more business engagement with the issue. A 2008 survey of 70 business leaders found that 42% declared they have a fair understanding of the issue and are developing a corporate strategy on climate change, and 41% have a good understanding and already have a strategy in place.<sup>30</sup> In the lead-in to Copenhagen, a section of organized business, the Confederation of Indian Industry, weighed in with public positions in support of India’s Copenhagen voluntary emissions-intensity target, and has also engaged with voluntary emissions disclosure initiatives.<sup>6</sup> However, another segment of business, the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry, issued a denouncement of the target, arguing that any action by India and Indian industry should be linked to provision of finance.<sup>8</sup> Notably both these views are extremely partial, and

exclude the entire range of small- and medium-sized enterprises in India.

### Domestic Debates—New Directions

As the discussion of various sectors of the Indian policy suggests, the climate debate in India has become more complex and multiple stranded in recent years. There is certainly growing engagement and involvement, as measured by parliamentary debates, media coverage, business perspectives, civil society statements, and the like. Much of this activity was, however, stimulated by Copenhagen. Substantively, the equity frame remains robust, but is increasingly complemented by calls for domestic mitigation measures. In addition, other aspects of the debate have led to increasing nuance and complexity of which I highlight three here: the ‘hiding behind the poor’ debate, perspectives on climate adaptation, and the importance of energy security as a dominant narrative for Indian energy.

In 2007, Greenpeace-India issued a report examining disparities in emission levels across economic classes in India, and accusing Indian elites of ‘hiding behind the poor’. The report self-declaredly sought to provoke a debate on climate justice within India by highlighting high levels of disparities between emission levels across the top and bottom classes and between rural and urban India, a point validated by other, more robust studies with larger data sets.<sup>31</sup> However, coming as it did shortly before the 2007 Bali COP and a drumroll of calls for India to take on emission limitation obligations due to growing consumption by its middle classes, the report also aroused intense criticism within India as under-cutting India’s negotiation stance. Counter-reports showed emissions at equivalent income classes were much higher in the United States than in India, suggesting that the salient frame for climate justice remained cross-country comparisons. For example, in 2004 the emissions of the top 10% of urban India were 7 tons CO<sub>2</sub>/year compared to average consumption levels of 20 tons CO<sub>2</sub>/year in the United States, and just over 10 tons CO<sub>2</sub>/year in Germany.<sup>32</sup>

While some within India have suggested the internal disparities call into question the legitimacy of the Indian per capita position,<sup>33</sup> at least to the extent it is not tied to attention to rectifying internal disparities, others suggest that the developed world is hiding behind India’s rich as much as the Indian rich are hiding behind the poor.<sup>34</sup> On balance, the hiding behind the poor debate has by no means dislodged broad acceptance of the per capita norm as a way of addressing climate justice, but it has nuanced the debate by highlighting India’s domestic distributive

challenges. By doing so, it has, to some limited extent, forced the climate spotlight inward, and not only on external North–South disparities.

A second important theme is growing awareness of climate damages and an attendant attention to climate adaptation, in rhetoric and reality. A growing number of studies are emerging that carefully document and publicize climate impacts and costs. For example, one study conclusively finds cultivation of apples in the Himalayan belt is shifting to higher altitudes, a finding confirmed by both quantitative data and farmer perceptions.<sup>35</sup> Another examines and decomposes the cost of sea level rise to one coastal state.<sup>36</sup> The government of India has also taken concrete measures to systematize data gathering on climate impacts<sup>37</sup> as well as encouraging states to undertake systematic efforts to mainstream climate concerns into sectoral planning.<sup>38</sup> These efforts are backed by large scale and comprehensive mapping of resources and the effects of climate change on them, for example in the water sector.<sup>39</sup>

However, it would be a mistake to assume that growing attention to and concern over climate adaptation necessarily translates into growing commitment to climate mitigation. As even India’s environmentalists argue, unilateral mitigation by India will do little, given that India’s emissions are about 1/20th of the global total.<sup>13</sup> Indian mitigation action only helps to the extent that it could leverage more aggressive global action by others, notably developed countries.<sup>19</sup> Concern with climate impacts and adaptation, therefore, reinforces rather than undermines concerns with equitable sharing of the mitigation burden.

Perhaps the single most important source of actions that have the effect of climate mitigation in India are driven by another objective entirely—energy security.<sup>40</sup> A pervading sense of energy insecurity has been created by the twin effects of growing demand due to India’s increased growth rate over the last decade, and supply pressures arising from global energy price increases in both coal and gas, short-term domestic supply shortfalls due to mis-governance and conflicts over access to resources, and a downward revision in estimates of coal resources. In contrast to climate mitigation, pursuit of energy security enjoys considerable political support, in a context where India’s domestic supplies are increasingly hard to access and or of uncertain quantity, global energy demands and therefore prices are rising, and geopolitical conditions in the Middle East and elsewhere raise growing concerns about predictability of supply. Many measures taken to address climate change, notably promoting end-use energy efficiency, and pursuing renewable energy supply, are consistent

with decreased greenhouse gas emissions. In the words of India's Finance Minister: "It is because we recognize the linkages between climate change and energy security that we have adopted a National Action Plan on Climate Change".<sup>41</sup>

The explicit linkage between development objectives and climate objectives has been facilitated by India's stated approach to climate action based on pursuit of 'cobenefits'—measures that 'promote... development objectives while also yielding cobenefits for addressing climate change effectively'.<sup>42</sup> This is not simply a matter of terminology or classification; the articulation of cobenefits reduces a potentially important source of dissonance in India's energy policy. Prior to articulation of this approach, there was a perceived risk among policy circles that promoting clean energy and energy efficiency could be strategically harmful, as it could be interpreted as evidence that India could and should undertake climate mitigation using its own resources, and also that India could develop with a lower allotment of carbon space.<sup>40</sup> The political priority given to actions to address energy security, and the alignment of climate mitigation as a potential cobenefit of such action, has created the impetus for policies that have the effect of climate mitigation, although they may not primarily be labeled as such.

### Three Contending Narratives

Taken collectively, the evidence across sectors of the Indian polity and the emergence of new areas of discussion suggests that debate on climate change has moved beyond an exclusive focus on the international negotiations context, to also ask questions about India's role and domestic policy. But there is little agreement on what India's domestic position should be with regard to climate change and whether and how this position should be embedded in the international climate regime. The range of possible political positions can usefully be described along three perspectives.<sup>43</sup>

The first perspective might be called the *growth-first realist* stance, which views climate change more as a geopolitical threat than an environmental one. Consequently, the focus is on achieving rapid growth, and staving off any international commitments that might threaten growth. Equity in climate outcomes is limited to a cross-country concern, arising from a mix of principled and strategic concerns.

A second position, *sustainable development realist* is focused on pursuing a cobenefits-based approach to sustainable development at home. However, a persistent skepticism of the international

negotiation process rooted in the low probability of the process delivering a fair outcome leads to calls to de-link domestic policy from the global process. While commitment to equity, including to domestic distributional questions, is likely to be genuine, this is framed as a domestic debate alone. This stance can lead to a somewhat schizophrenic stance—contention with growth-first realists at home and making common cause overseas.

A third stance, *sustainable development internationalists*, differs from the second only in greater emphasis on the need and urgency for an internationally effective climate regime, and therefore greater willingness to link India's cobenefits-based actions—but only cobenefits-based actions that are justified from a developmental perspective—to a global regime. While natural allies with the second category, based on a shared commitment to sustainable development outcomes and equity, in practice this alliance has failed to materialize, with realists of both stripes dismissing internationalists as naïve about the global politics of climate change.

The center of gravity of Indian climate politics rests with the second position—*sustainable development realists*. Interpretations of a swing toward the third perspective<sup>20,44</sup> were driven quite strongly by a high profile and outspoken Minister of Environment and Forests, rather than an underlying shift in Indian climate politics, and did not outlast his tenure. Indian climate politics supports domestic measures toward adaptation, and mitigation measures that are consistent with domestic development objectives. It does not, however, so far, support active utilisation of domestic policy as an instrument through which to engage and shape the international process. This is not to suggest that domestic and international climate policy occupy separate spheres, far from it. Indeed, Indian domestic policy has undoubtedly been influenced by global pressures to demonstrate a commitment to action. The result has been a flurry of policy activity in the years since the Bali COP of 2007.

### NEW DIRECTIONS IN INDIAN CLIMATE POLICY

Consistent with the emergence of a cobenefits frame as the defining construct for Indian policy on climate change, the government of India has embarked on a series of plan and policy development processes driven by this approach. This process defies easy summary, because it is of recent vintage, is work in progress and relatively little analysis is available. Moreover, the full assemblage of policy efforts is sprawling and includes international pledges, national plans and policies, and

state-level plans, all of which do not cohere neatly. While it is difficult to identify what the drivers are for each of these processes, the growing international pressure in the build up to Copenhagen, including climate discussions in G20 meetings, is likely one of the more important factors.

Arguably the hub of this array of policy-making efforts is the National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC).<sup>42</sup> It was built around the establishment of eight national 'missions' aimed at integrating mitigation and adaptation aspects of climate change into national policies across a range of sectors. Some of these missions had specific focus and targets, such as a Solar Mission aimed at enabling 20,000 MW of solar power by 2022.<sup>45</sup> Others, such as a National Water Mission, have broader and more diffuse objectives including water conservation, creation of a database, and promotion of basin level integrated water management.<sup>46</sup> Other missions focus on energy efficiency, agriculture, Himalayan ecosystems, sustainable agriculture, sustainable habitat, a 'green India' mission focused on the forest sector, and a strategic knowledge mission.

As this list suggests, the scope of the Plan is sprawling, which itself has aroused some criticism. One critique dubs it 'neither vision, nor plan'.<sup>47</sup> Another notes that there is no commitment to equity, although this position informs India's international stance.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, other than the cobenefits approach, there is no coherent strategy, either conceptual or in terms of overarching target-setting, that ties together the missions. Some of these lacunae are made up in individual missions, but the performance across missions also varies considerably. More tightly defined missions, such as those on energy efficiency and solar, have come up with their plans first and begun implementation. Other missions, that involve large areas of development policy such as water and agriculture, have taken longer to be approved and implemented.<sup>49</sup>

Nonetheless, individual missions, notably the solar and energy efficiency mission, are likely to substantially shape the Indian policy and energy landscape. Using an innovative reverse-auction method allowing companies to bid for the minimum subsidy they would accept to provide solar power, the solar mission has caused the price of solar power to drop by over half over the course of the three year program.<sup>50</sup> While it is unclear whether this is a sustainable trend, there is little doubt that the mission has re-shaped incentives for renewable energy development in India. Similarly, the energy efficiency mission has introduced targets for energy efficiency improvements across a wide range of industries,

accompanied by a scheme for trading energy efficiency certificates as a way of bringing down the cost of those improvements.<sup>51</sup> Both missions have had their share of critics. The solar mission has been criticized for underplaying rural electrification, and for not adequately considering the sustainability of the subsidy.<sup>52</sup> The energy efficiency mission has been criticized for not adequately considering simpler regulatory measures rather than the relatively complex market-based energy savings certificate approach.<sup>48</sup> Nonetheless, few would doubt that at least in these two cases, the missions have stimulated both action and debate in a way that would not have occurred in their absence. Similar conclusions cannot, by mid 2012, be drawn about many of the other missions, which are larger, more diffuse, and have yet to be implemented.

Since 2010, the central government has also requested states to develop State Action Plans on Climate Change (SAPCC). The SAPCCs are intended to achieve some coherence across states in design and implementation of climate measures, and have also been created in recognition of state jurisdiction over several areas within the NAPCC, particularly those related to adaptation.<sup>38</sup> Initial indications from these SAPCCs, which are a work in progress suggest that there will be considerable conceptual and implementation challenges to these plans. As in other countries, the plans will have to address the interlinkage between development issues and their climate aspects, a familiar challenge of mainstreaming climate change into development practice. Pragmatically, issues tied to India's federal structure and to practical questions of provision of financing are likely to pose implementation challenges. For example, urban habitats are under the control of states and local authorities, but there is already a far-reaching central government scheme intended to steer future urban development. Climate change will have to be integrated as an objective within an already littered institutional landscape.

At a macrolevel, in the build up to Copenhagen, the government of India also introduced a pledge to reduce the emission intensity of its economy by 20–25% from 2005 levels by 2020.<sup>53</sup> Notably, this pledge follows by more than a year the establishment of the NAPCC. In order to design a process toward meeting that pledge, the government also has established an 'Expert Group on Low Carbon Strategies for Inclusive Growth' under the auspices of its Planning Commission. The group was tasked with providing recommendations for inclusion in India 12th five-year plan toward low carbon growth that meets the Copenhagen pledge. Notably, the group is



also explicitly tasked with considering how growth can be made more inclusive. While the final report is awaited, the group has submitted an interim report that summarizes broad future directions for various emissions sectors under ‘determined’ and ‘aggressive’ scenarios.<sup>54</sup> While this effort is intended to build on the NAPCC and the subsequent missions, there is no explicit link between these processes.

While it is preliminary to comment on the effectiveness of all these approaches, it is increasingly apparent that translating low carbon development into action in India will pose a considerable governance challenge. The trend so far has been a largely top-down policy effort, albeit with a progressive decentralization of policy making from the national to the state. There are also, however, separate state initiatives, such as that of the state of Gujarat which established a Department of Climate Change even prior to formulation of its state action plan and which has launched initiatives on solar power.<sup>18,55,56</sup> In addition, the proliferation of policy processes suggests the need for coordination at multiple levels of government.

## CONCLUSION

Indian climate politics has been a story of remarkable consistency. India was instrumental in shaping the equity frame in global climate negotiations, and this, in turn, was developed through critique of global thinking led by non-governmental organizations. For nearly two decades, this construction has led to a reduction of Indian climate politics to a question of geopolitical positioning and strategy alone; climate policy has been divorced from development policy.

As the perspectives of different sectors of Indian society reported here suggest, this frame has considerable continued currency. While there are increasing

voices that call for India to take on a more proactive role in global climate negotiations and to more aggressively pursue domestic actions, the equity frame continues to be the larger conceptual umbrella to which these positions have reference.

However, the domestic debate has also widened and deepened. While still substantially an elite debate, concerns such as domestic equity, climate adaptation, and the linkages between energy security and climate change have produced a richer and more complex discussion. In particular, the articulation of a cobenefits led approach to climate change in conjunction with energy security concerns has potentially unlocked a path to deeper engagement with climate mitigation in a manner that does not challenge the equity frame. Pursuit of energy security has proved to be a particularly powerful driver of domestic action, leading to policy measures around energy efficiency and renewable energy, with associated climate mitigation cobenefits. So far, however, cobenefits remain as an articulation that governs domestic policy, while the equity frame continues to guide India’s international negotiations stance.

The emergence of a field of domestic climate policy is likely to introduce significant coordination and governance challenges to Indian climate policy. India has begun grappling with how to mainstream climate adaptation into sectoral policies such as water and agriculture. However, this embryonic integration also introduces institutional complexity and new politics. Institutionally, climate policy must now be interwoven into the complex governance apparatus of India’s federal system. The growing complexity is unavoidable and, indeed, to be welcomed, as it signals deeper engagement with the full range and implication of climate change concerns in India.

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