

India's Progress on Climate Targets: Achievements and Structural Gaps

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Climate Targets Latest News

- India's progress on its climate targets is under scrutiny as recent assessments highlight a gap between emission intensity reduction and absolute emission control.

India's Climate Commitments under the Paris Agreement

- At the 2015 **Paris Climate Summit**, India articulated its climate strategy based on the principle of *common but differentiated responsibilities*.
- Recognising its low historical per capita emissions, India committed to four major climate targets:
 - Reducing emissions intensity of GDP by 33-35% from 2005 levels by 2030
 - Achieving 40% non-fossil fuel power capacity by 2030 (later enhanced to 50%)
 - Installing 175 GW of renewable energy capacity by 2022
 - Creating an additional carbon sink of 2.5-3 billion tonnes of CO₂ equivalent through forests

- These commitments aimed to balance developmental needs with climate responsibility in a growing economy.

Progress in Emission Intensity Reduction

- India has made notable progress in reducing emissions intensity, emissions per unit of GDP.
- By 2020, emissions intensity had declined by around 36% compared to 2005 levels, allowing India to meet its original Paris target nearly a decade ahead of schedule.
- This improvement has been driven by three structural factors.
 - First, the rapid expansion of non-fossil electricity sources such as solar, wind, hydro, and nuclear significantly reduced the carbon intensity of power generation.
 - Second, India's economic structure has gradually shifted towards services and digital sectors, which are less emission-intensive than manufacturing.
 - Third, national efficiency initiatives like the **Perform, Achieve and Trade (PAT) scheme** and the UJALA LED programme have reduced electricity demand growth in industries and households.
- However, these gains largely reflect *relative decoupling*, where emissions grow more slowly than GDP rather than declining in absolute terms.

Persistently High Absolute Emissions

- Despite improvements in emissions intensity, India's absolute greenhouse gas emissions remain high.
- Territorial emissions stood at approximately 2,959 million tonnes of CO₂ equivalent in 2020 and have continued to rise thereafter.
- This highlights a key limitation of intensity-based metrics. While GDP growth has outpaced emission growth, total emissions have not declined.
- Sector-wise analysis reveals that emissions from cement, steel, and transport continue to increase, even as the growth rate of emissions from the power sector has moderated.
- As India is now the world's third-largest emitter in absolute terms, the challenge lies in converting intensity gains into real emission reductions.

Renewable Energy Expansion and Generation Gap

- India's renewable energy capacity expansion has been impressive. Non-fossil fuel capacity increased from about 30% in 2015 to over 50% by mid-2025.
- Solar power has led this growth, rising from less than 3 GW in 2014 to over 110 GW by 2025, supported by falling tariffs and domestic manufacturing.
- Wind power growth, however, has been slower due to land availability, grid connectivity issues, and state-level regulatory hurdles.
- A major concern is the **gap between installed capacity and actual electricity generation**.
 - Although non-fossil sources account for over half of installed capacity, they contribute only around 22% of total electricity generation.
- Coal continues to dominate power generation because of its ability to provide stable baseload electricity.

- Storage limitations remain a critical bottleneck, with battery energy storage capacity far below projected requirements for the next decade.

Forest Carbon Sink and Governance Challenges

- India is close to achieving its forest-based carbon sink target on paper.
- Official estimates suggest that only about 0.2 billion tonnes of additional sequestration is required to meet the 2030 goal. However, definitional and governance issues complicate this assessment.
- The Forest Survey of India's broad definition of forest cover includes plantations, monocultures, and tree cover outside natural forests.
- While this inflates carbon stock figures, it does not necessarily reflect ecological health or biodiversity restoration.
- Additionally, large funds under the Compensatory Afforestation Fund Act remain underutilised in several States, weakening implementation outcomes.
- Climate stress, including heat and water scarcity, further threatens forest productivity, especially in ecologically sensitive regions.

Source: TH

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