

India NDC Update: Key Targets and Challenges in India NDC

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NDC Latest News

- India's revised **Nationally Determined Contributions** (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement reflect a careful and measured approach to climate action.
- The government has chosen continuity and gradual progress, rather than major changes to earlier commitments.
- Despite challenges in energy and development, India is confident its targets are sufficient and aligned with its fair share of global climate responsibility.
- The approach is consistent with climate justice principles and India's status as a developing country.

India's Updated NDCs: Three Key Climate Goals

- **Emissions intensity reduction:** From 45% (by 2030) to 47% below 2005 levels by 2035.
- **Clean energy capacity:** 60% of installed power capacity from non-fossil fuels.

- **Carbon sink expansion:** Increase forest and tree cover to absorb 3.5–4 billion tonnes of CO₂ equivalent above 2005 levels.

India's Climate Policy: Structural Constraints and Evolving Priorities

- India's climate policy is shaped by its structural constraints as a lower middle-income country, which limit its choices.
- These constraints have remained largely unchanged, reinforcing India's emphasis on the UNFCCC framework.
- At the same time, the Paris Agreement's requirement of periodic updates has increased the role of short-term considerations.
- A worsening global climate environment has further influenced the formulation of recent commitments.

India's Climate Action: Enthusiasm Amid Constraints

- India continues to show strong commitment to climate action despite structural constraints.
- Both central and state governments are actively promoting initiatives such as electric vehicles, energy efficiency, expansion of non-fossil fuel energy, green hydrogen, and carbon capture and storage, with significant public and private investment.
- However, given its current developmental stage, India considers it premature to convert all these efforts into stricter NDC commitments, which involve higher accountability and regular reporting through **Biennial Transparency Reports** to the UNFCCC.

Debate Over Adequacy of Targets

- India's updated NDCs have sparked debate.
- Some critics argue they are insufficient for achieving the 1.5°C global temperature goal, while others downplay them as easily achievable or suggest alternative metrics like renewable energy generation instead of installed capacity.
- Even among supporters, there is uncertainty about whether the current commitments represent India's maximum possible effort at this stage.

The Cost of Going Green: Challenges in India's Climate Transition

- India's reliance on coal means that reducing emissions is not a natural outcome of growth but requires deliberate policy choices.
- Expanding renewable energy involves costs such as reducing coal-based generation, even when it is cheaper or readily available, thereby increasing the overall cost of climate commitments.

High Costs of Renewable Energy and Storage

- While renewable energy and battery storage projects are expanding, scaling up storage capacity to meet future needs will require investments of several trillion rupees.
- Much of this burden may fall on the government, diverting resources from other sectors.
- Options like pumped hydropower are limited due to environmental, regulatory, and water-use constraints.

Infrastructure and Grid Challenges

- Renewable energy expansion faces significant challenges, including inadequate transmission capacity and grid balancing issues.
- These hidden costs are often not accounted for when assessing the affordability of renewable energy.

Operational Inefficiencies and Curtailment

- Since coal remains essential for backup when solar and wind are unavailable, renewable energy use often has to be curtailed.
- This cyclical operation increases maintenance and operational costs for thermal power plants, adding to the overall cost burden.

Broader Economic Costs of Transition

- India is also investing in energy efficiency, industrial emissions targets, and rapid adoption of electric vehicles, alongside stricter emission norms.
- These measures represent significant economic costs that are often underestimated.

Lack of Climate Finance and Cost Assessment

- Despite substantial domestic investment in climate mitigation since COP26, there is limited international climate finance support.
- Moreover, the total cost of India's mitigation efforts so far has not been reliably estimated, creating a major knowledge gap.

Accounting for India's Developmental Future in Climate Commitments

- **Limits of Current Economic Extrapolation** – India's mitigation strategy cannot rely on simply extending current economic trends. Its future requires space for industrial growth, expanded services, and rapid urbanisation, which are still at early stages.
- **Development vs Climate Expectations** – Arguments that "India can do more" overlook the need to protect long-term development goals. Climate commitments must not constrain India's ability to meet rising economic and social demands.
- **Constraints of Global Climate Goals** – India cannot align its NDCs strictly with the 1.5°C target, as it is increasingly unattainable and beyond India's capacity to influence, given its low per capita emissions.
- **Inequitable Distribution of Climate Efforts** – Under the Paris framework, benefits of India's emissions reductions largely accrue to major global emitters, especially when leading historical polluters reduce commitments or withdraw from climate action.
- **Need for Strategic and Context-Based Commitments** – India's climate policy must remain strategic and cautious, with NDCs shaped by its national circumstances, balancing development needs with global climate responsibilities.

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