



COP26 - Achievements and Scope

This article is based on "[The Glasgow Summit on Climate Change: What Has It Achieved](#)" which was published in Livemint on 14/11/2021. It talks about the achievements of the UNFCCC COP26 Summit and the scope of improvement in climate change mitigation.

The recently held [COP26](#) was widely hyped as the last chance to save the planet. The meeting began with a bang, but ended on a more modest note. Notwithstanding, it did make some progress even if much less than was needed.

The summit had to deal with the disturbing prospect that the world was set to reach nearly +3°C by the end of the century, above the [2015 Paris Agreement](#) target of "well below 2°C" and ideally 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.

In this global problem of climate change, a much larger role is yet to be fulfilled by the world's three largest emitters, the developed nations and undoubtedly India.

Minutes of the Meeting: Achievements & Setbacks

- **New Global and Country Targets:** The [Glasgow Summit](#) has urged countries to consider strengthening their 2030 targets by COP27 to be held in Egypt in 2022.
 - The summit targeted global warming not to exceed +1.5°C and got about 140 countries to announce target dates for bringing emissions down to [net zero](#).
 - The achievement is significant as in the Paris Agreement, the developing countries did not agree to reduce emissions but just the "emissions-intensity" of GDP.
 - India has also joined the consensus and announced its [net-zero target of 2070](#).
 - This is a step ahead from India's past position where it never accepted the need to reduce emissions.
- **Glasgow Breakthrough Agenda:** A potentially important development which emerged out of COP26 (but outside the COP process) is the **Glasgow Breakthrough Agenda** endorsed by 42 countries (including India).
 - This is a cooperative effort to accelerate the development and deployment of clean technologies and sustainable solutions in areas such as clean power, road transport, steel and hydrogen.
- **Phasing-Down Coal Consumption:** Coal is the dirtiest of fossil fuels and an early phasing out of coal is clearly desirable. European countries have pushed hard for its phase out; however, developing countries have resisted this.
 - A middle path, as suggested by India, was referred to at the COP26 calling for a "phase-down" of coal-based power.
- **Best Case Scenario:** An early assessment by Climate Action Tracker (CAT), an independent organisation, suggests that the targets declared, if fully achieved, could limit global warming to around +1.8°C.
 - However, it also warns that the targets for 2030 are insufficiently ambitious. Unless significantly tightened, the world is more likely to end up seeing global temperatures rise by 2.1°C to 2.4°C.
- **Setbacks of the Meeting:**

- **Voluntary Targets:** The targets set at the meeting are voluntary with **no mechanism for enforcement or penalties** for non-compliance. Many **targets are conditional** on availability of adequate financial support.
- **Lack of Specific Details and Actions:** Many countries have **not provided details on specific actions** to be taken which would determine the actual trajectory to net zero which creates uncertainty about what will be achieved.
- **Failure in Securing Climate Finance:** The summit's mild admonition **only urges the developed country** parties to scale up their provision of [climate finance](#). It failed to firmly secure funding commitments from developed nations.
- **Unequal Distribution of Carbon Budget:** The world's top three largest emitters (China, USA, Europe) which account for about 30% of the world's population, would take up **78% of the carbon budget**.
 - China intends to hit peak emissions only by 2030, before going down to net zero in 2060; it would take up 54% of the global carbon budget against a global population share of only 18.7%.
 - The US, with 4.2% of the total population, would take up 14.2% of the budget and Europe, with 6.8%, would take up 9.5%.
 - This problem reflects the fact that focusing on net-zero dates **does not ensure a fair apportioning of the available carbon space** if the initial position in terms of emissions varies so greatly.

Way Forward

- **Suggestions for Largest Emitters:** China, instead of increasing emissions up to 2030, as currently declared, may **need to keep them at their current level for a few years** and then go down to net zero by 2050.
 - The **US should achieve a sharper reduction in emissions by 2030**, and also advance its net-zero date to 2040.
 - Europe as a whole should **follow the German/Swedish example and aim at net-zero by 2045**.
 - With this recalibration, the carbon emissions of this group would fall to 32% of the carbon budget, much closer to their population share.
- **Suggestions for India:** India's 2070 target would take up **18.1% of the carbon space**, which is a little higher than our **population share of 17.7%**.
 - It should be willing to consider a **modification in its trajectory as part of an agreed global package**, in which other countries also take appropriate action.
- **Coal-Based Power and India:** India has made **no commitments regarding phasing-down** of coal-based power; however, its [renewable energy goals 2030](#) are likely to reduce the share of the same from current 72% to about 50% by 2030.
 - Also, the government shall consider **ordering against establishment of any new coal-based plants** apart from those currently under construction.
 - What more is needed is a **policy of accelerated retirement of older, inefficient and polluting plants**, provided suitable financing can be obtained.
- **Encouraging Electric Vehicles (EVs):** India's net-zero by 2070 also requires phasing out petrol and diesel in transport and **shifting to [Electric Vehicles \(EVs\)](#) that use electricity from renewables**.
 - In order to make the country's entire fleet emissions-free by 2050, the government may consider **announcing against the sale of fossil fuel based vehicles after 2035**.
 - This would give the automotive sector about 15 years to restructure its production.
- **Need of Policy Changes:** Expanding renewable capacity requires policy action aimed at resolving problems such as **stabilizing intermittent supply from renewables**, building transmission infrastructure, **creating efficient electricity markets** and **fixing the financial weakness of India's discoms**.
 - These actions are not specified in the [Nationally Determined Contributions](#) but will have to be built into the domestic policy agenda in the years ahead.

Conclusion

- The COP26 of Glasgow is a promising start on emissions reduction, however, on the part of global

largest emitters, much more is expected to be done.

- In India's context, it needs to work out a detailed plan of action with reference to phasing-down coal-based power generation and encouraging electric vehicles.

Drishti Mains Question

Discuss the role of the largest global emitters and the developed nations in climate change mitigation.

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