



Doha Climate Change Conference: Uncertainty amidst Urgency

*Dr. Dinoj Kumar Upadhyay**

Climate change negotiations have entered into an uncertain phase of decision-making amidst growing urgency for substantial cuts in greenhouse gas (GHG) emission, more financial and technological resources for adaptation, and effective and efficient global environmental governance. Despite severe likely implications of unabated climate change for an inclusive sustainable development and economic growth, the international community appears divided on the 'normative claims', i.e. global climate regime, cooperation for climate financing, technology transfer etc. Recent trends indicate that prospects for stabilisation of CO₂, which is the main cause of global warming, emissions have been gradually fading. Emission patterns of GHG illustrate that global CO₂ emission reached an all-time high of 34 billion tonnes in 2011. Consequently, an increase in global temperature and frequency of climate induced disasters has been observed. The 'conflict of interest' among nations and social groups undermines the prospects of effective multilateralism to cope with climate catastrophe.

In this backdrop, the United Nations Climate Change Conference was held from November 26 to December 9, 2012 in Doha, Qatar. The Doha Conference was crucial for shaping the future of the Kyoto Protocol, new climate regime after 2020, and for formulating effective international mechanism for cooperation on the implementation of the Bali Action Plan 2008. The international community reaffirmed its commitment to limit changes in climate, outcomes of the Doha negotiations do not inspire much hope for meaningful and applicable

actions. Persisting financial crisis in Europe and the US, incremental and unilateral approaches to deal with climate issues, and lack of political will remain major hurdles in taking concrete steps at the negotiations.

Establishing a global regime based on the 'equity' and 'Common but Differentiated Responsibility (CBDR)' is essential for reducing GHG emissions. The Doha outcome is only a marginal step towards emission reduction goals. Although the Kyoto Protocol entered its second phase beginning from 2013 to 2020, it has very little significance in quantitative terms as it covers only 15 percent of total global emissions. Many industrialised countries, such as Japan, Russia, Canada and New Zealand have not signed the second phase of the Kyoto Protocol. The US has persistently refused to enter into a global climate change regime. The largest emitter, China is also out of the regime. As a developing country, India is not required to reduce CO₂ emission in second phase of Kyoto Protocol. Consequently, the regime would not cover 85 percent CO₂ emissions and seems to be virtually ineffective and meaningless. It would also hamper future global commitment for CO₂ emission reduction.

Climate change finance and technology transfer are sine qua non for mitigation and adaptation to climate change. There has been no remarkable progress in generating sufficient climate fund and transfer of clean technologies to developing nations at the Doha Conference. Advance technologies in energy or transportation, which primarily lie in the hands of developed countries, are crucial for facilitating sustainable development in developing countries. Demands of developing countries for additional resources and access to advanced technologies have not been explicitly addressed in the Doha conference outcomes. The AWG-LCA (Ad hoc Working Group on Long-term Cooperative Action under the Convention) was closed without any concrete steps on issues of financing, capacity building and technology transfer. The concept of 'loss and damage' was recognised in the negotiations. The Doha conference outcome merely encourages industrialised countries to keep up the level of US \$10 billion per year assistance between 2013 and 2015. Technology transfer has also been pushed to the agenda of the technical bodies of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

Differentiated impact of climate change would be more severe on the developing countries and marginalised sections of the society in these countries will be hit hard. India, with around 800 million rural population directly dependent on climate-sensitive sectors such as

agriculture, forests and fisheries for their subsistence and livelihoods, is one of the most vulnerable countries in the world. India's policy towards global climate change negotiations reflects both its domestic priorities and global obligation for controlling climate change for a sustainable world.

India has taken a number of initiatives to reduce its GHG emissions; for instance, it has announced that per-capita emission levels will not exceed the developed countries' emission levels. It also aims to reduce emission intensity of its Gross Domestic Production by 20-25 per cent of the 2005 level by 2020. India has also adopted the National Action Plan on Climate Change, which includes both mitigation and adaptation measures. Several initiatives have been taken to promote clean energy and energy efficiency in order to reduce the CO₂ emissions. The National Solar Mission intends to promote solar energy and the National Mission on Energy Efficiency aims to enhance energy efficiency.

The Doha outcomes have offered mixed success and failure for India. New Delhi had argued for a meaningful and comprehensive outcome in the Kyoto Protocol and implementation of Long-term Cooperative Action (LCA) tracks. However, several key concerns of India have been implicitly and explicitly incorporated in the discussions at Doha meetings. India successfully brought the Intellectual Property Rights matter into the climate change discourse. The second commitment for emissions reduction under the Kyoto Protocol is elusive, but developing countries including India have no binding obligation to reduce emissions by 2020. India is of the view that clean technology should be declared as 'global public goods', available to developing countries for free or affordable cost. The Doha Climate Platform launched at the Doha conference neither offers hope for adequate sources of climate finance nor technology transfer. India also advocated that the principle of equity is the mainstay of global climate change regime, and categorically stated that any tinkering with the term 'equity' would not be acceptable to it.

To conclude, despite there being no significant changes or major breakthrough in international negotiations on climate change to address the environmental and development challenges, people's awareness of the environmental challenges has been rising slowly across the world and countries are taking initiatives to address these challenges. There is a need for comprehensive and coordinated efforts at the global level for an effective and meaningful

transition towards a low-carbon economy. The international community should adopt clean technologies, improve energy efficiency, and turn to more sustainable sources of energy and modes of production and consumption without jeopardising the economic growth. Unchecked climate change could radically alter the prospects for growth and development in some of the poorest countries. Millennium Development Goals for 2015 are unlikely to be achieved in many regions of the world. Climate change can pose serious implications for the long-term ‘sustainability of development progress’ in the developing countries. This underlines the urgency of strong and early action to reduce GHG emissions. The fact that the developing countries are so far behind the advanced industrialised countries in energy consumption per capita suggests that more widespread adoption of energy-saving techniques would be needed to prevent a significant increase in world-wide energy consumption and CO₂ emissions.

With around 17 percent of world population, one of fastest growing economies of the world and the world’s fourth largest emitter of greenhouse gases, India has become a crucial player in the climate change negotiations. Climate change issue underpins almost all aspects of economy and society and has been intrinsically connected with global trade, security, technology transfer, energy etc. India should enhance its diplomatic activities with countries who share common concerns. Successful adaptation finely tuned with mitigation holds the key for inclusive development and economic progress in the country. The country’s expenditure on the adaptation programmes has increased to 2.84 per cent during 2009-10. Climate concerns and its related issues should be explicitly mainstreamed in India’s energy and foreign policy.

** Dr. Dinoj Kumar Upadhyay is Research Fellow at Indian Council of World Affairs, New Delhi.*