

TOPIC GUIDE: CLIMATE CHANGE AND DEVELOPMENT

"INDIA SHOULD PAY MORE ATTENTION TO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT THAN CLIMATE CHANGE"**PUBLISHED: 01 DEC 2009****AUTHOR: CHHANDAK PRADHAN**

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**INTRODUCTION**

Note that this Topic Guide was produced for Debating Matters India, and looks at the issues from a specifically Indian perspective.

Since its inception, the earth's climate has been **changing** as a result of natural forces. But in recent decades there have been growing concerns about the impact of climate change that has been **caused or accelerated by mankind's activities** during the process of industrialisation and economic development. A particular concern has emerged around **global warming** due to the emission of **greenhouse gases**, and attempts are being made both at national and international levels to reduce the level of emissions. However, carbon-reduction measures can be controversial, because of concerns that they result in adopting practices that are **less amenable to economic development**.

Under the **Kyoto Protocol**, only industrialised countries have committed themselves to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and submit annual reports on their measures. Developing countries - including India - are obliged to submit a 'national communication' report every six years to the UN climate body. The Kyoto Protocol expires in 2012 and the pressure is on for national governments to hammer out a new international treaty at the forthcoming **United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen** (7-18 December 2009). A major stumbling block to reaching an agreement is an increasingly rancorous debate over the extent to which large and rapidly developing economies, such as China and India, should sign up to limiting their future emissions alongside the already industrialised nations.

For India, a country threatened by climate change but struggling to pull hundreds of millions out of poverty, what is the best way forward? Is slowing the pace of development a worthwhile trade-off to limit the potentially catastrophic consequences of climate change, or will economic development afford Indian people the best protection against the ravages of nature – whether driven by man-made

climate change or by other factors? Can the drive for economic development be balanced with strategies to limit and absorb the impact of man-made climate change, or are the two priorities essentially incompatible? And what are India's responsibilities on the international stage – to stand up to the industrialised nations and insist this is a problem of their making or to demonstrate, as a nation of growing power and stature, its willingness to generate new solutions?

For further reading use the menu bar on the right hand side.

DEBATE IN CONTEXT

This section provides a summary of the key issues in the debate, set in the context of recent discussions and the competing positions that have been adopted.

The impact of climate change upon India

A recent **World Bank study** estimates that from 2010 adapting to impacts of climate change will cost up to \$100bn per year in the developing world. Assuming that temperatures will rise by 2 degrees Centigrade over the next 40 years, the study suggests that the major costs of adaptation would come from improving coastal protection and protecting transport links. Environmental campaigners **argue** that India's large and growing population, its 7500-km long densely populated and low-lying coastline, and the extent to which its economy is closely tied to its natural resource base, make the country 'considerably vulnerable' to the impacts of climate change. A trend **sea level rise of approximately 1cm per decade** has been recorded along the Indian coast, and there are concerns that global warming may lead to an increase in extreme weather events such as cyclones. There has been some suggestion that global warming may influence **monsoon dynamics**. In a country where, **it is noted**, 60% of farmland depends on rains, a shift in the rainfall distribution due to climate change would have far-reaching implications for the population.

A **factsheet** produced by the Centre for Science and Environment, an Indian advocacy organisation, describes the potential impact of climate change upon the nation's agriculture, human health, coastal areas and biodiversity. The World Health Organisation has **pointed to** the adverse effects of climate change upon human health, and suggested that reducing greenhouse gas emissions can be beneficial for health. If climate change precipitates extreme weather events, or makes rural areas impossible to inhabit or farm, there is a direct human cost, as '**climate refugees**' or 'environmental migrants' move to urban areas, putting pressure on civic amenities. It is therefore argued that it is in India's direct interest to deal with climate change now: the problem is not something that only future generations will experience. Some critics, though, have pointed out that the scientific evidence for more extreme weather events as the climate warms is **lacking** and that, in any case, economic development provides the best hope of coping with the vagaries of nature. Others have noted the alarmist language employed in the climate change debate and warned of the dangers of decision making based on hypothetical **worst-case scenarios**.

Levels of economic development

With a Gross Domestic Product (**GDP**) of **over \$1 trillion USD**, India is rated as the **twelfth-largest economy** in the world by financial entities such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Economic development in India depends on the various sectors that constitute the Indian economy – primarily the agriculture, services and manufacturing industries. Economic development has been rapid in recent years: as the Library of Congress **notes**, since the early 1990s, GDP has grown 4 to 7 percent annually, which is higher than GDP growth for the European Union, the United States, or the world as a whole. Agriculture accounts for about one-fifth of the country's GDP and provides the means of livelihood for **over 60 per cent** of the population. However, the proportion of workers employed in the agricultural sector is **declining**, and the proportion of GDP accounted for by industry (27.6%) and services (53.8%) is more than that accounted for by agriculture (18.6%).

India's economic growth **has been uneven** when comparing different social groups, economic groups, geographic regions, and rural and urban areas. Even though India has avoided famines in recent decades, **half of children are underweight**. However, as **the World Bank suggests**, 'India now has a diminishing pool of very poor people' and is poised to 'join the ranks of the world's middle-income countries'. According to this report, continued economic development, including increased agricultural productivity and investment in infrastructure, holds the opportunity to bring about a better livelihood for the whole population. The question is, if addressing climate change involves slowing the pace of development, is this a worthwhile sacrifice for the benefit of future generations? Others point out that given it is India's poor that will suffer the worst effects of climate change, not the growing ranks of the middle class, India must adopt a more **proactive** stance on tackling the problem.

The emissions divide: developed and developing world

The effects of global warming are a global concern – but ideas about how to mitigate these effects are sharply divided between the developed and developing world. On one important level, the issue is one of **fairness**: the developed world, comprising the USA, Europe, Japan, Canada and Eurasia, accounts for slightly over 50% of current carbon emissions; China adds about 20%; while India accounts for less than 5% of global emissions. Developing countries argue that they are already the victims of climate change caused by the activities of the developed world, and see it as unreasonable that their own development should now be constrained, particularly when this continues to account for a relatively low level of emissions. Despite projections that India's greenhouse gas emissions will **more than treble** over the next two decades, India's environment minister has argued that per-capita emissions would never exceed that of developed countries.

However, in the run-up to the UN Copenhagen conference, some have argued that, notwithstanding the moral responsibility of industrialised countries to commit to substantial reductions in their emissions, India needs to take responsibility for reducing its own emissions and '**stop playing the victim**'. The strategy of the Indian government of focusing only on measures where there are **co-benefits** for the economy and the environment, they argue, is short-sighted. The influential **Delhi Science Forum**, for example, argues that with its growing contribution to the current flow of greenhouse gases being added to the atmosphere, **India should demonstrate** that it is conscious of its responsibilities to the world's poor and most vulnerable by agreeing to a cut in its projected emissions by 2030. This, advocates argue, will put pressure on the developed world to meet their obligations and prevent countries like the US from portraying India as obstructionist.

More recently there have been signs of a shift in the Indian government's stance and suggestions that India will adopt a **more conciliatory attitude** than some other developing nations at Copenhagen. However, is there a danger that India will take the emission-reducing agenda too far, and undermine its opportunities to become a richer, more developed country that will be better placed to absorb the impact of global warming?

ESSENTIAL READING

It is crucial for debaters to have read the articles in this section, which provide essential information and arguments for and against the debate motion. Students will be expected to have additional evidence and examples derived from independent research, but they can expect to be criticised if they lack a basic familiarity with the issues raised in the essential reading.

New Script for India on Climate Change

Jim Yardley **New York Times** 3 October 2009

A bad climate for development

Economist 17 September 2009

Behind India's Intransigence on Climate-Change Talks

Madhur Singh **Time Magazine** 10 September 2009

FOR

Poor nations will struggle with World Bank's climate change plans

Carl Mortished **The Times (London)** 16 September 2009

Shifts On Climate Change- Rich countries would like poorer countries to cut emissions

Chandrashekhar Dasgupta **The Telegraph** 1 September 2009

India and climate change talks

Arvind Panagariya **ET Bureau Economic Times (India Times)** 29 August 2009

Spiking the road to Copenhagen: The Western obsession with curbing carbon emissions is wicked

Deepak Lal **Business Standard** 25 August 2009

IPCC: separating fact from fright

Rob Lyons **spiked** 19 November 2007

AGAINST

India's ugly climate belly: Emissions near tipping point

GS Mudur **The Telegraph (India)** 20 July 2009

Climate change and its impact on India

E C Thomas **Rediff.com** 5 June 2007

KEY TERMS

Definitions of key concepts that are crucial for understanding the topic. Students should be familiar with these terms and the different ways in which they are used and interpreted and should be prepared to explain their significance.

Global Warming

Greenhouse gas

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

Kyoto Protocol

BACKGROUNDERS

Useful websites and materials that provide a good starting point for research.

New hope for climate talks as India takes small step towards deal

The Times 21 October 2009

India, China sign climate pact

Times of India 21 October 2009

The stupidity of India's carbon policy

Rajesh Goli **RajeshGoli.com** 24 September 2009

Climate questions we don't want to ask

Alex Hesz **Guardian (UK)** 11 September 2009

India's greenhouse gases to double by 2031, predicts report

Yvonne Chan **BusinessGreen** 3 September 2009

India's middle class must cut its hot air emissions

Dean Nelson **Telegraph (UK)** 3 September 2009

Cong, BJP, Left and climate change

Amit Bhattacharya **Times of India** 11 May 2009

The Business of Climate Change [↗](#)

BBC World Service 7 April 2009

Redress of climate change crisis a common responsibility [↗](#)

The Hindu 6 February 2009

International Scientists Dissent Over Man-Made Global Warming Claims [↗](#)

US Senate Minority Report 11 December 2008

Climate Change: Impacts, Vulnerabilities And Adaptation In Developing Countries [↗](#)

Information Services of the UNFCCC secretariat 2007

The Science and Politics of Climate Change [↗](#)

Battle of Ideas 2007 [fora.tv](#)

The Skeptical Environmentalist [↗](#)

Bjorn Lomborg

An Inconvenient Truth [↗](#)

Al Gore

United Nations Development Program- Impact of Climate Change in India [↗](#)

Climate Change & its possible Impact on India [↗](#)

Greenpeace

Report on Impacts of Climate Change - Western and central India [↗](#)

Centre for Science and Environment

ORGANISATIONS

Links to organisations, campaign groups and official bodies who are referenced within the Topic Guide or which will be of use in providing additional research information.

Government of India - Ministry of Environment and Forests [↗](#)

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [↗](#)

UN Climate Change Conference, Copenhagen [↗](#)

United Nations Environment Program [↗](#)

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change [↗](#)

IN THE NEWS

Relevant recent news stories from a variety of sources, which ensure students have an up to date awareness of the state of the debate.

Climate change is one of the most complex problems facing humankind today [↗](#)

Hamid Ansari and Anita Joshua **The Hindu** 24 October 2009

Pachauri invokes Gandhi to drive his point on Climate Change [↗](#)

Zeenews.com 4 October 2009

Climate change threatens 25 mn children with malnutrition [↗](#)

The Economic Times 1 October 2009

India's stand on climate change is 'unchanged' [↗](#)

Rajesh Sinha **DNA** 30 September 2009

\$100bn A Year For Climate Safety [↗](#)

Richard Black **BBC News** 30 September 2009

Climate change to cost \$100 bn per year: World Bank [↗](#)

The Economic Times 29 September 2009

Climate Change: India can learn lessons from China, says Jairam Ramesh [↗](#)

The Times of India 23 September 2009

Benefit of downturn: CO² emissions fal [↗](#)

The Times of India 22 September 2009

Investment in climate change is not charity: UN [↗](#)

The Times of India 21 September 2009

ANALYSIS - Poor nations CO₂ curbs strengthen hand in UN talks [↗](#)

David Fogarty and Deborah Zabarenko **Reuters** 17 September 2009

US seeks to bring China, India on board on Climate Change [↗](#)

Live Mint 17 September 2009

Climate change may reduce South Asia GDP 4-5 percent: World Bank [↗](#)

The Economic Times 16 September 2009

Engineers find ways to combat climate change [↗](#)

The Times of India 14 September 2009

Himalayas hotspot of climate change [↗](#)

Nandita Sengupta **The Times of India** 4 September 2009

Climate change killing corals, costing billions: Study [↗](#)

The Economic Times 2 September 2009

Surat ahead in Asia for its climate change strategy [↗](#)

The Times of India 27 August 2009

India and climate change talks [↗](#)

Arvind Panagariya **The Economic Times** 27 August 2009

India makes forestry key plank in climate change plan [↗](#)

The Times of India 11 August 2009

Climate change ideas [↗](#)

The Telegraph (India) 29 July 2009

FACTBOX - Impact of climate change on India [↗](#)

Reuters India 29 July 2009

Climate change costs India over 2.6% of GDP: Survey [↗](#)

The Economic Times 2 July 2009

India among countries leading fight against climate change: WWF [↗](#)

The Economic Times 18 May 2009

Tough climate signal to West [↗](#)

The Telegraph (India) 1 March 2009

AUDIO/VISUAL

The Science and Politics of Climate Change [↗](#)

Battle of Ideas 2007 **fora.tv**

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