
Climate Crisis and the Compelling Need to Act

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Abstract

One of the most pertinent issues that has been attracting attention from the world leaders and rightly so is the issue of climate change. As per the United Nations, Climate change refers to long-term shifts in temperatures and weather patterns. These shifts may be natural, but since the 1800s, human activities have been the main driver of climate change, primarily due to the burning of fossil fuels (like coal, oil, and gas), which produces heat-trapping gasses.

Recently, the much talked about Glasgow Climate Change Conference was concluded. It is organized under the aegis of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. The forum provides to the parties a platform to build a bridge between good intentions and measurable actions; and take policy decisions which result in fervent progress at large. The conference ended on November 13th, falling 24 hours behind the pre determined schedule. The impasse surrounding the conference exposed the harrowing reality that the world is facing currently. We are failing to limit global warming to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, despite the same being set out in the Paris agreement of 2015. Nonetheless, this year's summit has laid down certain new stratagem to deal with the hazards of climate change. However they will be of some utility only if the

world leaders pledge to completely adhere with them and make climate change a pivotal point in their respective domestic policies. In pursuance of the goals laid down in the Paris agreement, the summit has sought to stir up action in order to bring about real changes on the ground. In an important step taken, governments agreed to invigorate their national plans for reducing emissions over the coming decade before meeting for cop27. It is supposed to be held in the November of 2022 in the Egyptian resort of Sharm el-Sheikh. This is largely a step taken towards actually materializing the now abstract intentions of the parties involved and this seems like a way to boost up the entire series of actions towards the cause of climate change.

This year's conference has also brought India at the helm of affairs pertaining to the environment. India can be safely placed in the category of achievers when it comes to its own Nationally Determined Contributions. India has shown intent as well as commitment to strengthen the fight against climate change. This new leadership role played by India on this front has brought attention to the new emerging world order that is multilateral in its spirit and form. This is also attributable to the consciousness received by the concept of 'climate justice.' "Climate Justice" is a term, and more than that it is a movement, a movement that acknowledges that climate change can have differential social, economic, public health, and other adverse effects on underprivileged populations. This fact has also been acknowledged by the United Nations Secretary-General, Mr. António Guterres. In his words, "And, as is always the case, the poor and vulnerable are the first to suffer and the worst hit."The adverse impacts of climate change will, although, affect all sections and societies of the world, the intensity of such an impact cannot be anticipated to be of the same nature. The poor, underprivileged sections of the world populations are most

susceptible to such adverse impacts of climate change as discussed below in this article.

Firstly, when we look at the demography or population distributions in nations having long coastlines such as India, we arrive at one conclusion, that is that the people inhabiting and dominating such areas are mostly the poor and underprivileged. The fact that the land near the coast is comparatively cheaper substantiates this fact. As a result of global warming, the sea levels are rising and there is a constant threat of submergence of these coastal areas and lands. The same can be illustrated by having a look at the dire situation of the biggest delta in the world, the Sunderbans, which is submerging with each passing moment. Due to this menace of submergence, such sections of the population constantly are living under a dark cloud of threat lingering over their heads.

Secondly, another major impact of climate change is the spasmodic seasonal changes taking place all across the globe. There are prolonged periods of flood like conditions and droughts. This adversely affects the agricultural ecosystem, thereby, resulting in frequent crop failures. What needs to be noted here is that such conditions are not specific to any one country or part of the world; they are uniform all across the globe. Crop failures, year after year, make it very difficult for the farmers to practice agriculture. This, in turn, results in the loss of livelihoods for these farmers.

India is urbanizing as it is industrializing, moving directly to electrification, renewable energy, digital economy and more sustainable practices. The values of the Indian civilization are already centered around sustainable practices such as not wasting food. India is a developing nation and as such most of the infrastructural requirements are not yet fulfilled. Even in such a scenario, India's current per capita emissions are less than half the global average. This is in tune with the country's pledge to reach

'net-zero' by 2050. The irony that was seen during the Glasgow summit was that the host country was stressing to cut down on coal usage. Coal is the most abundant energy resource and it is pretty much essential to develop infrastructure. It was the same country whose own entire process of industrialization was fuelled by the usage of coal.

A floor and a ceiling both need to be riveted for the developing as well as the developed nations. Flexibility and rationality should be the driving force while formulating the way ahead to tackle climate change globally. The policies should be flexible enough to make room for the developing nations to further develop assets and infrastructure, and to prosper. And at the same time, the developed western countries should acknowledge the issue of wasteful consumption and consumerism. They should claim their stake and limit wasteful consumption. This double pronged approach will help the world leaders to frame policies that are resilient enough to meet the needs of the fast changing times.

It is high time now for individuals to come up and lead the movement against climate change in order to bring about a transformation in the status quo as soon as possible. It is the individuals who make society, and it is the society that makes countries and leaders. If the individual unit of this entire system becomes consciousness enough then it is safe to say that what now seems like a farfetched goal may become achievable. Small changes adopted by communities go a long way.

Urban areas having high population densities face the problem of traffic as the numbers of personal vehicles are increasing manifolds with each passing day. A simple solution to this complex problem is car pooling. If neighbors going to similar destinations start ditching their personal vehicles and switch to car pooling then such issues can easily be tackled. Even if we are falling behind in fulfilling

the targets for limiting greenhouse gas emissions, etc, we can still contribute in such small but meaningful ways to make a small difference in our surroundings.

Environmental consciousness should be inculcated in the minds of young children through the school curriculum. If they are made aware of the hazards of climate change at a young age, then there is hardly any speck of skepticism that they will grow into individuals who care about the environment they breathe in and are capable of making a change. Even if the path ahead seems hazy and befogged, consistent and conscious efforts can change the grim reality that the world is facing today. Small contributions and changes in the habits and patterns of the people are still capable enough of making a difference.