

The Action Plan on Climate Change, G8 Declaration and the Accra Climate Change Meet: Points to Ponder

Introduction:

This is a critical time for Climate policymakers in India and South Asia. First, the countries of the region are all gearing up for another round of Contact Group meeting at Accra, in August, where the pending issues of Bonn will be discussed. Secondly, the largest economy of the region, India, has just announced its National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC)¹. It is now widely accepted that the political pressure on economies like India China and Brazil is mounting for a commitment on legally binding obligations. The NAPCC, in that sense, is an important step forward. While on one hand, these large developing nations are subject to pressure from developed countries to act on a problem created primarily by them, on the other, it is evident from emission trends and its global impact that these nations need to be more efficient in energy use and forest management, if not emission reduction directly. The action plan is based on the premise that India will be substantially affected by climate irregularities in future and applies to its neighbouring countries as well. The NAPCC is a step towards building a unilateral roadmap to address the issue. It is also an opportunity to make concerted efforts and mainstream climate change concerns in the development process.

A Brief Note on NAPCC

The plan's core emphasis underpins the objective of meeting growth targets in an ecologically sustainable manner. Deriving the results from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, it identifies eight mission-based approaches to meet the potential threat of the future (see box). India could gain significantly from climatic and non-climatic factors by enhancing the ecological sustainability of its development. For this, we will need to mainstream the climate-induced concerns in the planning processes. The eight missions are a step towards that goal. However, these missions are - neither a vision statement nor a plan of action but a sketch of development priorities for future action. The eight robust missions for a re-look at the linkages between ecology and economic development are neither target-driven nor time-bound thereby harbouring a threat that these might end up in the web of different ministry-initiated 'schemes' that might miss the point of climate protection, which has been the overwhelming trend so far. A major issue lies in the way of execution of the ambitious policies like the ones related to solar power

generation. There is little by way of elaboration on the precise manner in meeting the policy goals. The Planning Commission's Integrated Policy on Energy (2005) emphasises on the use of coal as the major source of energy till the year 2031-32. It estimated that with the utilisation of full potential during this period, the country would need to source only 5-6 per cent of its total energy requirements from hydro sources. Even with a maximum of 20-fold increase in both nuclear and renewable capacities, the country may generate 5-7 per cent of the total energy requirement from each of the nuclear, hydro and renewable sources. (see table below).

Table-1: Projected Increase in Demand for Energy in the Non-Commercial Sector

Year	(Quantity by MTOE)									
	Fire Wood & Chips		Electricity		Dung Cake		Kerosene		L.P.G.	
	7%	8%	7%	8%	7%	8%	7%	8%	7%	8%
2000	74.58	74.58	12.13	12.13	19.95	19.95	9.56	9.56	7.08	7.08
2006	88.46	88.64	17.10	18.17	36.55	36.97	12.58	12.68	14.86	15.85
2011	87.81	87.90	28.68	31.13	30.67	31.03	13.17	13.18	23.12	25.27
2016	92.31	92.59	38.50	42.58	32.58	32.21	13.98	13.82	31.28	34.30
2021	96.10	96.85	49.65	54.89	32.62	31.45	14.29	13.98	39.35	42.45
2026	99.04	100.01	60.95	66.19	31.34	30.00	14.23	13.88	46.20	48.55
2031	101.36	102.08	70.78	74.82	30.02	29.14	14.06	13.76	51.16	52.49

Source: Integrated Energy Policy, Planning Commission, 2005, 7 per cent and 8 per cent represents projected GDP growth of the economy. It further assumes that there is on an average 1 per cent rise in incomes for the rural mass during the said period.

It has been observed that the roadmap to meet this energy demand is strongly biased in favour of conventional energy sources, usually associated with GHG emissions. Therefore, in order to attain a low-carbon sustainable development trajectory, there is need for an alternative roadmap. The National Solar Mission is a step in exploring that roadmap.

The next important issue of concern is the amount of resources required for developing a climate resilient roadmap for the country. It has been estimated that 2.63 per cent of the GDP would be required to develop such a plan (NAPCC, 2007). However, there is little or no information on its specificities and how we arrive at this number. The detailing is important to delineate the impact of climate change-induced

¹National Action Plan on Climate Change, Government of India, Prime Minister's Council on Climate Change, 2008.

efforts by the government from regular emergency related expenditure. Further, this will help estimate the magnitude of the problem and the attention required.

The basic assumption behind the missions outlined in the NAPCC appears to be the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities. Hence, the argument put forward by India about maintaining its present trend of production and growth may be roughly justified. The plan of action conceived in the NAPCC emphasises on technology transfer as a tool for bringing about change, but the shortcomings in the form of specific efforts are missing. More importantly, the NAPCC does not contain the essentials of the dynamics of modern day climate negotiations: it fails to appreciate the growing impact of climate change, the need for major polluters including India to come to the negotiating table and discuss time-bound targets for emission reduction. Finally, the NAPCC does not outline a definitive strategy on how to take the missions off the ground.

NAPCC and the G8 Declaration

A few days after the publication of the NAPCC, the G8 meeting at Hokkaido, Japan, spelt out the plans of the world's influential economies to combat climate change. The communiqué shared by the G8 identifies a 'goal' which the parties in the group will try to achieve in future. Two factors are important in this regard. First, the implication of the word 'goal' suggests that it is essentially a normative approach and not a binding commitment. However, the propaganda of this communiqué has been in the form of binding commitments. Secondly, there is no time frame mentioned in the communiqué for meeting the 'goal'. Despite the lack of any demonstrable progress in reducing emissions or commitments to reduce developed country emissions in the future, the communiqué wants developing countries to commit to 'meaningful mitigation actions to be bound by an international agreement to be negotiated by the end of 2009'.

Eight Missions of the NAPCC

National Solar Mission

In view of the increasing share of renewable energy usage, India aims at tapping the huge solar energy potential. It should help in decentralised energy distribution and increased access to the grassroots. This mission is regarded as a tool to tackle the issue of energy poverty in India.

National Mission on Energy Efficiency

This mission has envisaged the use of existing energy in an efficient manner. The mission outlines the strategies to achieve this through market and non-market arrangements. Its emphasis is on reducing direct carbon emissions through mitigation policies involving technological improvements, fuel switching, providing adequate investment, capacity building initiatives and a regulatory framework.

National Mission on Sustainable Habitat

An overarching mission with three components: promotion of energy efficiency in residential and commercial sector, management of municipal solid waste and urban public transport system. This will be achieved through incentive-based financing involving carbon markets, cost-cutting measures through energy efficient appliances and the introduction of energy efficiency-based labelling. Solid waste management is to be carried out through the involvement of decentralised process through Urban Local Bodies as fulcrum to the whole process. There are recommendations for updating the solid waste management techniques and focus on benchmarking of practices, monitoring and enforcements.

National Water Mission

Focus is on water management processes followed to address the issue of ground water depletion and huge surface run-off losses occurring every year. It also addresses the problem of accessibility of safe drinking water. The plan of action outlined in the mission addresses the problems through management of groundwater resources through water harvesting measures, thereby recharging natural aquifers. Mandatory auditing of industrial water usage processes and industrial waste disposal mechanisms are included as steps to tackle overexploitation of ground water resources. Apart from this, maintenance of wetlands through conservation plans forms an important part of the mission.

National Mission on Sustainable Ecosystem

Given the importance of the Himalayan ecosystem on the country's ecological security, the mission looks forward to securing the Himalayan region's forest cover, perennial rivers, biodiversity, thereby providing a rich base for agriculture and tourism. This effort, according to the mission statement, will ensure proper monitoring of some of the endangered and critical issues related to glacier retreat, loss of biodiversity and aims to build up collaborative mechanism among neighbouring countries.

National Mission on Sustainable Agriculture

This mission attempts to build up a climate resilient agricultural policy consisting of plans on dryland agriculture, the risks involved in agriculture due to climate uncertainties, information sharing on different agricultural practices, mainstreaming and documentation of traditional knowledge sources for tackling certain problems on agricultural adversities, building regional databases of species and soil types.

National Strategic Mission on Strategic Knowledge

The objective of assisting the other missions is laid out in the NAPCC, but there is a need to build well laid out research and development strategies. R&D initiatives are necessary to build understanding and scientific information on the problem of climate irregularities. This in turn will help in building climate resilient development trajectories for the country through indigenous Regional Climate Modelling.

Such a step will shift the burden to the developing countries and impede their economic performance (Sanwal, 2008)². The NAPCC's approach to the demand side management

²The G-8 and India's National Action Plan on Climate Change, Economic and Political Weekly, July 19, 2008, pp. 1-18.

techniques is actually an inducement to undertake cost-effective measures. 'It actually redefines cost-effectiveness of measures in terms of opportunity costs rather than the bottom line of the industrial sector of an economy' (Sanwal, 2008)³. However, these positive efforts in building a roadmap for emission reduction by the developing countries like India gets reduced globally with the G8 remaining non-committal on their emission reductions. The communiqué actually reflects the vision of the US-led agenda of bullying the developing countries to agreeing on a course of meaningful mitigation by the end of 2009. These initiatives, according to experts, are attempts at shifting the burden on the developing countries, which will have a negative impact on growth and meet the development goals of developing countries.

Addressing the attempts of burden shifting to developing countries, the NAPCC has clearly spelt out its policies to modify activities that generate carbon dioxide emissions through the empowerment of new knowledge. The NAPCC has rightly pointed out the need for technological knowledge sharing. In all of the missions defined in the document, the demand and its unimpeded flow forms the core of the future plans. Therefore, it is necessary for the developed countries to extend the idea of shared vision.. The liberal interpretations of shared vision will ensure adequate responsibility sharing based on the capability and historical emissions records of the countries.

The NAPCC in the South Asian Climate Change Concerns

Being the largest economy in South Asia, India's economic relations have a direct impact on its neighbours. At the last meeting of SAARC nations at Colombo (August 2-3, 2008), climate change figured prominently on the agenda. The other SAARC nations do not face the prospect of legally binding commitments for reducing GHGs, and accept the adaptation route to climate change as the key to a climate resilient development framework. Apart from the crises precipitated by changing temperatures and pressure zones as a result of climate change, a significant problem that requires urgency may be the rising sea levels in Bangladesh, Maldives and Sri Lanka, other than coastal India. The IPCC report estimates that there will be significant losses in coastal ecosystems and a million or so people will be affected as a result of flooding. The report has put this in the High Confidence level.

Table-2: Select Vulnerability Areas for the South Asia Region

Area of Vulnerability	High Confidence	Medium Confidence	Low Confidence
Agriculture			
(a) Crop Yield			
(b) Water Availability			
(c) Water Stress			
(d) Glacial Melt			
Coastal and Marine Ecosystem			
(a) Flooding			
(b) Sea-level rise and sea water intrusion			
(c) Ecosystem loss (depletion of coral reefs, species loss etc.)			
Demographic Effect			
(a) Population Pressure			
(b) Hunger			
(c) Morbidity and mortality			
(d) Water Borne Diseases			
(e) Vector borne Diseases			

Source: IPCC, Working Group II, Fourth Assessment Report, 2007; High Confidence: About 8 out of 10 chance of being correct; Medium Confidence: About 5 out of 10 chance of being correct; Low Confidence: About 2 out of 10 chance of being correct.

The table depicts the severity of climate change that will impact the region. Of critical importance is the cross-cutting nature of the crises: agriculture, food supply, health and ecosystem loss are all indicated in high degree of severity. With half the world's population living in the region, these are serious concerns to be dealt with on a war footing. 'Because of increasing interdependency of the global food system, the impact of climate change and food supply and demand in South Asia as a whole as well as in countries located in the region depends on what happens in other countries' (IPCC, 2007)⁴. India's surplus food grains helped provide food support to drought-hit Cambodia in the recent past. However, with rising population, higher demands for food and reduced supply emanating from limited availability of cropland area and falling yield, there will be increasing incidence of hunger.. It is estimated that by 2020, there will be an additional 49 million people in Asia (under the A2 scenario)⁵, and hunger will rise by 7-14 per cent (IPCC, 2007)⁶. Added to this is the demand for agricultural land, urban townships and consequent deforestation, and the South Asian region appears to be a perfect picture of environmental disaster.

South Asia has witnessed rapid urbanisation, infrastructural development, and heightened economic activity over the last few decades. This has led to a staggering demand for energy in the growing economies of the region. Although the relationship between the growing urban areas and climate change are yet to be quantified, it is widely accepted that urbanisation will amplify climatic change. A recent report

³Ibid.

⁴Climate Change 2007: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability, Working Group II Contribution to the Fourth Assessment Report on the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, Cambridge University Press, 2007.

⁵A2 Scenario: The A2 storyline and scenario family describes a very heterogeneous world. The underlying theme is self-reliance and preservation of local identities. Fertility patterns across regions converge very slowly, which results in continuously increasing population. Economic development is primarily regionally oriented and per capita economic growth and technological change more fragmented and slower than the other storylines. The different storylines listed are: A1, B1, and B2. For details please see IPCC Third Assessment Report, 2001.

⁶Climate Change 2007: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability, Working Group II Contribution to the Fourth Assessment Report on the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, Cambridge University Press, 2007.

IPCC (2007) clearly puts the element of conjecture away: 'the climate change will exacerbate the existing heat-island phenomenon in cities of Japan by absorbing increased solar radiation. This will lead to further increase in temperatures in urban areas with negative implications for energy and water consumption, human health and discomfort' (IPCC, 2007)⁷.

Funds are necessary to meet the restoration costs arising out of natural calamities that may directly or indirectly be induced by climate change. Researched reports lend a credible view to the linkages between climate change and extreme events. The NAPCC has somewhat vaguely identified the extreme events, providing a staid statistical reference instead of seeking to address the issue. Further, the eight missions laid out in the NAPCC do not outline a concerted process of sourcing public funds for abrupt climate behaviour, or even mainstreaming the response mechanism to extreme events in the planning process. The reason behind this myopic attitude lies partly in uncoordinated approach in tackling the problem of climate change at large. The government is yet to mainstream the plan outlay and budgetary allocation process for climate-related issues and as such, they have in a way failed to provide a roadmap to address climate change over the next decade.

The need for public provisioning of finance is important, as it is a powerful mechanism for the actual implementation of the plans and securing the needs of the marginalised sections of society. The option of insurance cover and investment in weather derivatives are far beyond the reach of the small farmer or landless labour. With below poverty population well above the government's figure of 260 million, the policy of insurance options for mitigating climate uncertainties remain a distant dream. What is required is financing mechanisms that will enable adaptation to climate impact and may be complemented with insurance and other risk reduction mechanisms. Microfinance options well publicised today with the Gramin example, are also afoot in India.

Micro-credit could be used as a viable solution to climate change irregularities. The success story of the Gramin Bank in Bangladesh is a powerful example of utilising minimum resources with optimal efficiency.

In the NAPCC, what one misses are directions and action plans which could have given shape to the lofty goals. There is ample scope for making a coordinated, regional climate-resilient development path, but the National Action Plan on Climate Change falls short as an action plan.

⁷Ibid

The Road to Accra

The signatories will be meeting at Accra to deliberate on issues pertaining to the Working Group on Further Commitments on Kyoto Protocol and on Long-Term Cooperative Action. There needs to be an honest effort by the Annex-I countries to reduce emissions and declare their targets by September 5, 2008. In this regard, the EU, which had initiated a response mechanism through EU-ETS, is expected to take the initiative. Side by side, there is a case for US and other large developing nations (India, China and Brazil) to emerge from the per-capita based entitlement issue and add numbers to their promises; which the NAPCC has conveniently skirted.

For a fruitful action plan, a review of Article 9 of the Convention (Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice), the submissions related to implementation of commitments for review and reporting, provisions of financial resources, and technology transfer should feature as the main talking points at the forthcoming Accra meet. Developing country groups such as G 77 and China are required to develop specific textual proposals. The Accra meet will be an opportunity for progress on a number of functional areas.

The developing countries at the Accra meeting should be pressing for the improvements suggested in the texts to meet the goal of development with a climate-friendly trajectory. The G 77 and China block, a representative platform for the South Asian region, should ensure there is continuity in the Kyoto process and that the approach needs to be inclusive and based on technology transfer to developing nations.

It is an important opportunity for the country as well as other regional members to develop a roadmap for climate-friendly development path. Importantly, India needs to be positive as far as emission reduction targets are concerned: the need of the hour is well co-ordinated global action to combat climate change. There is also a need for addressing livelihood security and finding alternative dimensions to solve population-related problems like poverty crisis which is at the core of India's development roadmap. Internationally, India should look for advancements in discussions on technology transfer, financing and adaptation issues. This is important to meet the NAPCC goal of integrating climate stabilisation and development concerns.

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