

A black and white photograph showing a man from the side, looking towards a vast landscape. He is wearing a light-colored shirt and a dark scarf. The background consists of a series of fields with small, scattered trees, stretching to a distant horizon under a clear sky.

Climate Change Policy in India and Goal 13

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Introduction

Climate change concerns have seen tremendous momentum in the past few decades with increasing international cooperation, improvements in climate science and more practical solutions (both mitigation and adaptation oriented) at multiple scales. From a development perspective, climate change is increasingly being recognised as a risk multiplier that disproportionately burdens the poorest and most vulnerable. As we move towards an increasingly urban planet, this risk will be felt intensely in cities and city regions. Alongside the global response to climate change, there has been a growing involvement of municipal governments and other actors in cities to deal with challenges posed by a changing climate. Urban regions are therefore emerging as critical players in dealing with the impact of climate change.

From a global environmental perspective, the current wave of urban-focussed growth and development as well as global and regional sustainable development trends offers a unique, large-scale opportunity to leapfrog unsustainable development trajectories and put in place transformative development pathways that focus on implementing low-carbon, local and regional climate resilient development. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), in its Assessment Report 5 (AR5), recognised urban areas (Revi et al., 2014; Seto et al., 2014) as distinct categories for the first time, individually and collectively, outlining a framework that brought together the elements of adaptation and mitigation, and offered climate-centric solutions that could be explored in conjunction with addressing challenges of employment, poverty and inequality. It also underscored the importance of urban areas as a critical locus of climate related impacts as well as solutions, and identified how urban systems could potentially contribute significantly to local and global climate mitigation and adaptation, which local, regional and national climate action plans have often missed.

This commentary explores how Goal 13 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which focusses on climate change, can help shape national and regional policy. It situates this discussion within the Indian policy context by assessing current efforts by the Government of India to tackle climate change at various levels. It also begins to identify key challenges and opportunities within the Indian policy framework that can help our cities become more resilient to a changing climate.

Climate change and Goal 13

Targets and Gaps

SDG 13, on climate change, asks governments to ‘take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts’. The goal recognises that addressing and minimising the risks posed by climate change is integral to the successful implementation of the SDGs. It has been lauded for forefronting concerns around climate change concerns and the urgency of the risks it poses, especially in the context of the climate-development interface.

The goal is wide in scope, with a focus on adaptation and mitigation, mainstreaming climate concerns in development policies and discussing financial mechanisms to meet the targets. However, a closer look at the targets within Goal 13 (Box 1) shows that significant domains have been left out.

First, three of the four targets (13.1, 13.2 and 13.3b) focus on awareness raising and capacity building. While they respond to calls for improving capacity to adapt (Lemos et al., 2007), they do not specify who this capacity building should be targeted at and what mechanisms can be used to carry it out. As research has repeatedly shown, capacity building alone does not necessarily lead to improved adaptation action (Fazey et al., 2010) and such initiatives need to be flexible, iterative, forward-looking and repeated. Moreover, the first target (13.1) mentions the need to 'strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity...*in all countries*' (emphasis added). The target masks inter-country and intra-country differences—the goals and challenges of building resilience and adaptive capacity in the global North are significantly different from those in the global South and the climate change narrative over the past decades has changed to reflect these differences. Within countries such as India or China, where trade-offs between the rural and urban, industry and farming, subsidies and market-driven growth are made regularly, decisions regarding what capacity must be built and for whom are difficult and fraught with financial and ethical implications.

13.1 Strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters in all countries

13.2 Integrate climate change measures into national policies, strategies and planning

13.3 Improve education, awareness-raising and human and institutional capacity on climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning

13.3a Implement the commitment undertaken by developed-country parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change to a goal of mobilizing jointly \$100 billion annually by 2020 from all sources to address the needs of developing countries in the context of meaningful mitigation actions and transparency on implementation and fully operationalize the Green Climate Fund through its capitalization as soon as possible

13.3b Promote mechanisms for raising capacity for effective climate change-related planning and management in least developed countries and small island developing States, including focusing on women, youth and local and marginalized communities

* Acknowledging that the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change is the primary international, intergovernmental forum for negotiating the global response to climate change.

Box 1: Goal 13: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts

Second, the target on integrating climate measures into national governance (13.2) is so broad that it loses meaning and application in practice. Research has demonstrated how mainstreaming of climate concerns in national and sub-national policies is often done in response to international pressure but in practice, mainstreaming often ends up being a

reorientation or renaming of development activities as adaptation interventions (Singh et al., 2016; McGray, 2007). In such a context, it would be more useful to have a target that lays out how climate measures can be integrated into national policies and planning by providing examples of good practices, identifying key actors involved in the process, and discussing innovative ways to tackle policy and decision-making bottlenecks (e.g., dealing with uncertainty, making trade-offs).

Third, financial instruments to meet Goal 13 have been discussed (13.3a) but are confined to the Green Climate Fund and do not mention the Adaptation Fund, which was established in 2001 to finance climate change adaptation and resilience activities in developing countries. Given the complex architecture of climate finance (Nakhooda, Watson & Schalatek, 2013), the question of how other market and non-market financial instruments can be used to meet Goal 13 remains unanswered.

Fourth, the targets are often overlapping and unclear. For example, target 13.3 discusses climate finance and awareness building together; target 13.3b makes a case for focussing on the most vulnerable but fails to take a nuanced approach. Critically, the targets do not take into account the growing acceptance of how vulnerability (and hence adaptive capacity) is socially differentiated and temporal—thus, not all women are vulnerable, not all inhabitants in developing countries are exposed to climate change, and households or countries considered ‘safe’ at one point may become vulnerable at another.

The climate goal suffers from the same issues faced by the SDGs in general, that the goals are often self-contradictory and sectoral in their approach (Griggs et al., 2014). In the absence of clear targets of whose adaptive capacity is to be built and how this will be done and funded, fleshing out context-specific details of the targets would be a good step forward.

Synergies with other climate processes

In December 2015, the Paris Agreement was signed under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), with the aim of reducing the pace of climate change and accelerating and intensifying actions and investments needed for a sustainable low-carbon future. Adaptation action emerged as a strong way to deal with present and future impacts of climate change, and a global stocktaking was established to assess collective progress every five years (starting in 2018).

The UN acknowledges that such climate action and the SDGs (especially Goal 13) are closely linked. However, it remains unclear how the SDGs will add to or tie in with agreements like the Paris Agreement and other related global policies such as the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015–2030) or the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). There is also a need for the mapping of such global agreements and parallel processes to avoid redundancy and duplication, and excessive monitoring and reporting (especially in the context of inadequate and poorly trained government staff); addressing complex problems in a sectoral manner; and fragmentation of funding.

The Indian policy context

India's domestic position and policy on climate change, until recently, rarely acknowledged the issue as one having relevance for the country's development imperatives (Dubash & Jogesh, 2014). However, over the last decade, there has been a gradual change in perceptions around the issue of climate change emerging both within national and state governments in India, as well as among various non-state actors including the private sector and civil society groups (*ibid*). Since 2007, especially, responding to international pressure for action, there has been more focussed domestic policy movement around climate change and related issues, including the creation of institutional structures at the national and state levels to prioritise and implement climate change action plans. While the growing involvement of national and state governments and their agencies in climate change policy has been a welcome change, local governments in Indian cities have been notably absent from this process and are seen only as conduits for implementation.

In India, climate change action plans have been formulated at the state (regional) level by government officials from state-level agencies, but aim to integrate national priorities with the respective state's development goals. Government officials from Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) are typically absent from the plan-making process. This is a function both of the governance structure in Indian cities as well as a lack of awareness and capacity to deal with these challenges. Climate change in the context of Indian cities is rarely seen as an urban challenge by local and state governments (Sharma & Tomar, 2010). This is exacerbated by the governance framework in India, where local governments have very little power and decision-making authority (Weinstein, Sami, & Shatkin, 2013; Pinto, 2000). Fragmented urban governance, and the division of responsibilities for urban planning among a very wide range of agencies, often lead to a lack of ownership over larger issues. There is also a huge challenge in terms of the awareness of the issue itself, and the capacity to engage and deal with it within government. That said, there are a few examples of what Pasquini et al. (2015) call 'environmental champions' in a few Indian cities: political leaders who have explicitly engaged with climate change as an issue in urban areas and attempted to develop strategies to tackle emerging concerns (*ibid.*, 2015). However, these remain a minority and climate change is yet to become a priority.

Environmental governance in India

In the Indian context, environmental governance has largely been underpinned by concerns around reconciling developmental priorities and economic growth with sustainable development pathways (Dubash & Joseph, 2015; Nair, 2015). The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) has adopted an overarching environmental policy (National Environmental Policy, 2006), which sets mandates for concerned departments, both

at the apex and at the sub-national (state and provincial) level for the implementation of environmental quality standards (thematic areas of air, water and solid waste management and land degradation) within their defined areas of jurisdiction.

Climate change policies in India are firmly anchored within a co-benefits framework, focussing on leveraging the synergies between development and climate outcomes (Dubash, 2012; Revi, 2008). These were first articulated in the National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC) 2008, and were also explicitly stated in the 12th Five Year Plan, introducing measures that promote economic development while yielding secondary climate benefits. NAPCC, released in 2008, aimed to create a directional shift in India's development trajectory by integrating climate concerns with larger developmental ones (Dubash & Joseph, 2015; Byravan & Rajan, 2012) through sustainable development pathways that advance both economic and environmental objectives. Strategies outlined include deployment of appropriate technologies, use of innovative markets, regulatory and voluntary mechanisms, and linkages between various stakeholders.

The plan itself was organised around eight missions or sectors, which map out long-term, integrated strategies towards national goals around climate change, ranging from solar power development to agriculture and water as well as a separate mission on the Himalayan ecosystem (Byravan and Rajan, 2012; Prime Minister's Council on Climate Change, 2010). Several of the NAPCC missions (Energy Efficiency, Water and Greening India, for example) offered opportunities for urban-scale engagement, including one (the Mission on Sustainable Habitat) that focussed explicitly on cities.

Following the development of the NAPCC, in 2009, the Government of India asked state governments to mirror this process in their respective states, focussing specifically on developing policies and plans that align with the eight NAPCC missions and the development priorities of each state. The aim was to decentralise the implementation of the eight NAPCC missions beyond the national scale, especially because several of the focus areas of the missions (such as water and agriculture) were state subjects (Dubash & Jogesh, 2014). As of October 2016, 32 states and union territories in India have State Action Plans on Climate Change that have been endorsed by the National Steering Committee on Climate Change (MoEFCC, 2016). The state plans seem to focus largely on good sustainable development strategies, rather than addressing climate change specifically. They also took the lead from the MoEFCC in focussing largely on adaptation rather than mitigation, integrating their climate change action plans with the overall development goals of the state. However, here too, the urban story was largely missing.

Indian cities and climate change

A significant share of incremental global urbanisation will take place in India over the next few decades, along with a growing concentration of historical and emergent climate risk. Although India's urban regions have the potential to drive regional, national and global development, Indian cities need to develop successful climate mitigation and adaptation strategies to

address national and global sustainable development concerns, as articulated in the UN SDGs and the Habitat III Agenda.

Unfortunately, there are significant gaps in the literature, policy debates and policy instruments in this space in India; there are also significant gaps between international commitments and domestic policy and practice. Not only are institutional capacities and resources limited in Indian cities, but these are often complex, multi-hazard environments and climate change hotspots with large populations living in poverty, highly vulnerable to both everyday risk as well as extreme events and risks arising from climate change related variability, such as drought-induced water scarcity and food insecurity, localised urban floods, and urban heat island effect, as well as environmental and health risks. Coordinating and integrating climate mitigation and adaptation actions in these cities will require careful analysis, stakeholder consultation and mobilisation and determined action.

To leverage their developmental potential and build resilience, cities will need to address multiple challenges, including the provision of basic services, safe housing and sustainable livelihoods, natural resource constraints, deteriorating urban ecosystems and unplanned urban growth, in a manner that is consistent with the emergent SDGs and new global urban agenda. This framing could potentially offer an opportunity to include the climate response in the context of meeting developmental and climate goals. The framework that will enable the effective integration of developmental priorities and climate goals has the potential to set up a trajectory that builds beyond India's commitment to the UNFCCC in Paris through the Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs). Such a framework could offer a robust mechanism through which loss and damage due to climate change can potentially be addressed.

Climate change in India should ideally be seen in the context of three simultaneous ongoing transitions: a rural-to-urban demographic transition, centred around the growth of secondary cities; an energy transition from biomass to fossil fuels to renewables and greater energy efficiency; and a three-part environmental transition—brown (water, sanitation and environmental health), grey (air and water pollution) and green (climate change). Addressing these dimensions will require a multiplicity of varied city/sub-regional strategies and drawing on bottom-up innovation to respond to local climate risks. Cities across the world have demonstrated their leadership in climate action and its convergence with the development and disaster risk mitigation agenda, and Indian cities need to work out a mechanism to participate in this global collective.

One of the most serious challenges that we face in India is that of fragmented urban governance, making coordination across different agencies and scales challenging. Cities also accumulate and generate new risks through unplanned development, are vulnerable to food, energy and water fragility and consequent social and political unrest. Most climate and urban policy making and planning, including resilience planning, often takes place at the level of state government, while the role of ULBs, civil society and communities tends to be that of

implementation with little room for innovation. These risks and challenges undermine the potential of cities to foster inclusive and sustainable growth.

Decentralised adaptive management strategies that engage with a political, policy and implementation continuum from the neighbourhood, city and region to the national level have proved to be more effective in India than centralised top-down interventions. A coherent framework, which takes into account public policy, private sector and civil society urban development and planning actions, can reduce vulnerability and risk in a steady, iterative manner over a period of decades. This, in turn, requires a new set of incentives and structures that link short-run priorities with long-run strategic actions—a major shift from India's current urban management paradigm. Existing legal, regulatory and governance structures and the institutional culture of most cities are inadequate to address the challenge of climate change adaptation and mitigation. A coherent urban governance, planning and service delivery framework as well as institutional arrangements will be necessary to link urban renewal and development with short- and medium-term hazard risk reduction and, further, with climate mitigation and adaptation.

An appropriate urban platform to enable multi-stakeholder engagement with mitigation, strategic risk sharing and adaptation could help create appropriate fiscal and financial incentives linked to neighbourhood-led processes, especially in informal settlements. An outcome could be a linked set of politically mandated City Low-carbon Climate Programme of Action (based on experiences with Local Adaptation Plans for Action in other geographies) linked to private sector and community-led actions that focuses on the primary urban greenhouse gas flux sectors, i.e., transportation, building and energy systems.

Coordinating domestic climate policy and Goal 13

The Government of India has appointed the National Institution for Transforming Urban India (NITI Aayog), successor to the Planning Commission, as the nodal agency to coordinate the SDGs. Together with the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI), NITI Aayog will work together with the different line ministries to develop indicators that reflect the SDG goals and targets. There has already been an initial mapping exercise to identify specific nodal and other ministries for individual goals and targets, as well as the mapping of some of the recent initiatives undertaken by the central government (NITI Aayog, 2016).

The initial mapping exercise has identified MoEFCC as the nodal ministry for Goal 13. It has also identified a couple of other ministries such as Home Affairs and Information & Broadcasting to assist with specific targets. The larger concern is that there is, as yet, no centrally sponsored scheme that has been identified as a potential source of financing to help with the implementation of the targets. The related interventions that have been identified map onto the eight NAPCC missions. Lack of adequate funding is another critical barrier in the implementation of the climate action plans at the state level. While several states have

identified the key goals and targets they would like to achieve, there is not much financing available to help them with implementing these.

There are, however, other opportunities that can and should be leveraged within the domestic policy framework. The focus here is on specific policies and programmes that target urban India. In the initial mapping exercise for Goal 11, MoEFCC was identified as one of the concerned ministries to assist with the implementation of Target 11.6: 'to reduce the adverse per capita environmental impact of cities'. There are also several central schemes as well as related interventions for Goal 11 in particular that may be leveraged as part of a climate-action oriented agenda. While several of these offer opportunities for co-benefits, here we use the Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) as an illustration. Close to 500 cities are proposed to be funded under the scheme, with an investment of ₹50,000 crore, targeted over five years. Some of the key thrust areas under AMRUT that every city included in the programme has to engage with include the development of an integrated master plan, development of public transportation infrastructure with a focus on non-motorised forms of mobility, sustainable water management and increasing green spaces within the city. There are also funds allocated for capacity building for officials within ULBs.

This creates the scope for synergies between the two goals, as well as the integration of planning and reform efforts. It also offers the opportunity to generate awareness about a co-benefits approach to climate action at the urban scale, as well as building capacity of ULB officials to effectively deal with climate change challenges. The thrust areas could be successfully leveraged under a co-benefits approach that would be in keeping with the larger developmental aims of the central government while simultaneously beginning to work towards both climate change adaptation and mitigation. Another potential area of opportunity is harnessing ongoing civil society and private sector action to buttress government interventions around climate action. Such an approach will help widen the ambit of responsibility as well as build upon existing interventions such as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities by private companies around environmental protection (e.g., Bosch's work on lake rejuvenation in Bangalore) or civil society projects to build urban resilience (e.g., the Asian Cities Climate Change Resilience Network).

India's policy response to reduce vulnerabilities induced by climate change on human settlements manifests itself in two forms: missions and programmes. The Government of India devised NAPCC in 2008 to pave the way for a directional shift in the country's development pathway. NAPCC promotes development objectives with embedded benefits for both adaptation and mitigation through eight missions, some of which incorporate urban initiatives. However, these missions are open-ended and lack specific goals, targets and measures. The NAPCC missions, together with India's INDCs, will need to be strategically re-designed to bring the adaptation and mitigation issues together in a coherent framework that is backed with governance innovations.

We argue that India has the institutional architecture to undertake meaningful action towards meeting the targets under Goal 13 on climate change. However, to make the goal truly transformational, it will require mapping existing programmes on climate action (e.g., NAPCC) with the SDG targets to avoid redundancy and ensure the judicious use of funds, and a reorientation of action towards urban areas.

We conclude by highlighting some of the key issues that will need greater attention as Indian cities begin to address climate-related challenges. It is imperative to work towards evolving a robust framework that has the ability to radically change how Indian cities respond to the climate challenge. These changes will be driven partly by governance innovation and partly by creating effective implementation mechanisms.

1. The implementation of the Paris Agreement in the context of both India's INDCs and the global response to the climate challenge is the most pressing challenge in the next few years. Indian cities need to identify concrete measures that lead towards sustained decarbonisation and make infrastructure choices that help in avoiding high-carbon lock-ins. In addition, cities need to address residual loss and damage due to unmitigated climate change through innovative policy and planning decisions and find ways through which climate impacts are minimised. It is widely recognised that adaptation response is a highly localised issue and Indian cities will need to respond through local innovations in planning and policy narratives.
2. It is vital for Indian cities to tie into bottom-up international climate response processes such as the Compact of Mayors and other related networks so as to leverage the potential of accessing climate finance and knowledge to enable meaningful transformation at the local level. This, however, will need a reform of existing governance mechanisms.
3. A city-level climate operational strategy will require dovetailing of interventions across developmental and infrastructure transitions, for which a robust implementation framework will have to be identified. This will require explicit connections to be made with other goals within the SDG framework that allow for simultaneous achievement of basic development goals and climate targets. Effective implementation across climate, disaster risk and the development agenda will be the most significant challenge that cities will face. A mechanism that allows flexibility of integrating and mainstreaming the climate change, disaster risk and development agendas into the broader climate-risk response framework will have to be created.

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