



Paris Climate Accord

Table of Content

1	Introduction	2
2	Background to the Summit.....	2
3	The Outcome	2
4	Assessment	3
4.1	What the deal achieved.....	3
4.2	What it did not achieve	3

1 Introduction

- The **Durban Summit** held in **2011** decide that the second commitment period will start on 1 January 2013 and run until 2017 or 2020. In 2014, the talks at **Lima** were concluded by elaborating the elements of the new agreement, scheduled to be agreed in Paris in late 2015, while also agreeing the ground rules on how all countries can submit contributions to the new agreement during the first quarter of next year. These **Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs)** will form the foundation for climate action **post 2020** when the new agreement will come into effect.
- Hence, the Paris Climate Accord became the bedrock on which the future structure of climate change was to be built and thus gains immense importance.

2 Background to the Summit

- **INDCs**
The INDCs combine the top-down system of a United Nations climate agreement with bottom-up system-in elements through which countries put forward their agreements in the context of their own national circumstances, capabilities and priorities, within the ambition to reduce global greenhouse gas emissions enough to keep global temperature rise to 2 degrees Celsius. The INDCs contain steps taken towards emission reductions and also aim to address steps taken to adapt to climate change impacts, and what support the country needs, or will provide, to address climate change. Under the Paris Agreement, the INDC will become the first Nationally Determined Contribution when a country ratifies the agreement, unless they decide to submit a new NDC at the same time. Once the Paris Agreement is ratified, the NDC will become the first greenhouse gas targets under the UNFCCC that applied equally to both developed and developing countries.
- **US-China Agreement**
In November 2014, US and China agreed to limit greenhouse gases emissions. The joint announcement showed that it was possible to bridge the old divide between developed and developing nations that had stymied global progress for so long. It was also important owing to the fact that the two are the largest emitters and US had shown unwillingness to reduce its greenhouse gases in the past citing lack of binding commitments on China and India.
- **Loss and Damage Clause**
Loss and damage denotes impacts of climate-related stressors that occur despite efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to climatic changes. It is often associated with liability and compensation. There has been a divide between developed countries, which are historically responsible for most greenhouse gas emissions, and developing countries that are more vulnerable to impacts of climate change over it. For vulnerable countries, loss and damage is most of all about recognizing that past and current efforts to avoid dangerous climate change, and that there are limits and constraints to adaptation. In 2013, the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage associated with Climate Change Impacts was established. Developing countries have demanded loss and damage assistance and pushed hard in Paris for a separate section of the agreement dealing with loss and damage.

3 The Outcome

- It commits 196 countries to work together to limit global warming to no more than **2 degrees Celsius** above pre-industrial levels, with a stretch goal of keeping below **1.5 C**. It also calls for stopping the rise of greenhouse gas emissions as soon as possible.
- In **2018**, countries will take stock of their progress on meeting their pledges, and by 2020 they will have to produce new INDCs or restate the existing.
- The Paris Agreement is **not a treaty**, and countries' INDCs are not binding. Still, the deal contains some binding elements, such as requiring countries to participate in a system for measuring their progress on achieving their goals. The implementation of the agreement by all member countries together will be **evaluated every 5 years**.
- Finance will be provided to poor nations to help them cut emissions and cope with the effects of extreme weather. Countries affected by climate-related disasters will gain urgent aid.

4 Assessment

- Paris produced an agreement hailed as “historic, durable and ambitious”. The Paris Agreement for the first time brings all nations into a common cause based on their historic, current and future responsibilities. To reach the ambitious and important goals, appropriate financial flows will be put in place, thus making stronger action by developing countries and the most vulnerable possible, in line with their own national objectives.

4.1 What the deal achieved

- Previous agreements put all the responsibility for reducing emissions on rich countries. In the Paris Agreement, all 196 signatories agreed that every country must take action, while acknowledging that richer countries should start immediately and cut emissions more steeply, while poorer countries’ contributions will depend on their individual situations.
- Ratchet mechanism i.e. the technical term for the agreement to submit new pledges by 2020. Most INDCs set goals through 2030, but if we don’t improve upon them, it will be impossible to stay below 1.5 C and almost impossible to stay below 2 C. The ratchet mechanism requires countries to return to the table in 2020 and spell out their plans for 2025 to 2030. This creates the opportunity for the world to potentially put itself on a course to stay below 2 C, but we won’t know the outcome until 2020 and beyond.
- Small increases in climate finance, including adaptation aid. For many developing countries experiencing the effects of climate change, increased aid for adaptation was a top priority. Thus far, most climate finance has been for reducing emissions. Now, the developed nations have committed to increase their adaptation aid including the US.
- Richer developing countries have started contributing to climate finance. At Paris, richer developing nations, in particular China, refused to accept formal responsibility to contribute, but they agreed to do it on a voluntary basis.
- Developing countries demanded loss and damage assistance. They demanded a separate section of the agreement dealing with loss and damage. It was accepted but did not put binding commitments. It merely directs a task force to develop recommendations for integrated approaches to avert, minimize and address displacement related to the adverse impacts of climate change.
- Agreement was reached against the backdrop of a remarkable groundswell of climate action by cities and regions, business and civil society. Countries at Paris recognized the enormous importance of these initiatives, calling for the continuation and scaling up of these actions as an essential part in the rapid implementation of the Paris Agreement.
- The targets that nations have submitted ahead of the Paris conference show that demand for wind, solar and hydro will grow.

4.2 What it did not achieve

- The INDC commitments are voluntary, which means there is no penalty for failing to meet them. And even if they are met, they will not put the world on a path to less than 2 C of warming. Under the most optimistic assumptions, the INDCs still set us on a path to 2.7 to 3.5 C of warming.
- The U.N. approach has been to get countries to offer cuts in emissions and increases in renewable energy deployment, energy efficiency, or carbon sinks, but it has not called for restraining fossil fuel development.
- Indigenous rights of people suffering due to activities like fossil fuel extraction are mentioned in the preamble, but left out entirely of the operational text.
- INDCs of rich countries are not enough to meet their historical obligations. U.S. comes in for particular blame. It is giving less, relative to the size of its economy, than less populous countries such as Canada and many European nations. US also did not agree to make the INDCs binding, thus keeping the chance of backtracking on it with the change in the government.
- The Paris Agreement calls for decarbonization i.e. “achieve a balance between anthropogenic emissions by sources and removals by sinks of greenhouse gases in the second half of this century.” In other words,

sometime between 2050 and 2100, we should have net-zero carbon emissions. That's not the same thing as no carbon emissions. It means that we could still be emitting carbon, but that would be balanced by removing carbon from the atmosphere through carbon sinks like forests or through CCS or other yet-to-be-developed technologies.

- The promise of contributing \$100 bn annually to the Green Climate Fund by developed countries is still unmet. Although, the contribution has been increased, yet it is enormously short of what is actually needed.

If everybody acts to make meaningful progress, it will build confidence and all countries are going to share the burden. But, the fact that most of the agreement consists of promises or aims and not firm commitments puts the success of Paris Accord in doubt. Yet, Paris Agreement shows there is still hope for maintaining a livable climate, but there's a lot more work to be done pushing world governments to meet the challenge.

VISION IAS

Copyright © by Vision IAS

All rights are reserved. No part of this document may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior permission of Vision IAS.