

INDIA IS UNPREPARED FOR PARIS CLIMATE SUMMIT

India's preparations for the crucial climate summit in Paris are wanting, especially when it comes to long-term impacts on ecosystems



India should strengthen its focus on south-south cooperation in time for the Paris summit

In the run-up to the seminal UN climate summit in Paris this December, the big question is, can the world construct a 'house' where all countries can live, while keeping in mind that in this process there is one party that does not negotiate – nature.

Climate change negotiations for several years now have become the testing ground for diplomacy at different levels. With the emerging dynamic of debates between developed and developing countries on issues ranging from technology transfer and financing, the dynamic within and between countries is bound to take new twists and turns on a regular basis.

One key area in which developed countries have upped the ante is the way they use diplomacy and negotiation skills to their advantage. They combine broader environment diplomacy, climate policy with foreign policy, trade and development debates. Developing countries and Least Developed Countries (LDCs) are often at a disadvantage to counter the debates and negotiate critical issues due to lack of national prioritization to ensure the international negotiations deliver the results they need.

Proactive and creative articulation of issues and positions is the nerve centre of such preparations and participation.

Recently, countries such as Gambia have appointed special climate envoys to move the national agenda on climate change. Such prerogatives have generally been seen thus far in developed countries only.

Three issues need to be considered when one discusses and uses climate diplomacy today. First, national prioritization and comprehensive action programmes on climate change; second, creative articulation of policy issues of national relevance that broadens the negotiation spaces; and third, developing positions during negotiations that balance predictability and flexibility to push agendas of interest. Preparing for these is a continuous process and governments cannot sit to discuss issues a few weeks before the negotiations.

Prime Minister's council needs strengthening

India's prioritisation still needs focus and strengthening, especially on issues of overall importance to the country in dealing with climate change. A case in point is the absence of strategic focus on ecological impacts of climate change. The Prime Minister's Council on Climate Change needs to ensure comprehensive coverage of issues relevant to India – not just achieving energy security and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. These cannot be the only yardsticks for climate change policy.

Pronouncements by India in recent years on issues such as common but differentiated responsibilities have left quite a few governments confused. The timing of these pronouncements – beginning from the 2011 Durban climate summit till now – is a testimony to this public perception of a lack of prepared positioning by India.

Any seasoned negotiator will tell us that one critical measure of success is to keep the negotiating positions close to one's heart and ensure full and broad engagement with all relevant actors to move one's interests forward. For some reason, this approach seems to be wanting in India.

What about biodiversity?

India needs to broaden its national priorities. For example, one wonders why there is no significant policy and political focus on long term impact assessment of climate change and ecosystem resilience in India. This biodiverse country has much to lose from climate change, but we still do not know how much. There are several short-term activities supported by various ministries on climate change adaptation, mitigation and resilience, but there is no system to use climate data to assess impacts on natural ecosystems. India is yet to position itself at the science-policy link with regard to climate change, ecosystems and biodiversity.

Similar is the issue of documenting and using local, traditional knowledge on climate adaptation and mitigation. Scattered projects and documentation of a few case studies are not enough. We need a national coordinated programme on the role of community based adaptation and mitigation actions.

Sustainable Development Goals

One of the key areas where diplomacy will have a role to play in advancing national interests of sustainable development and environmental security is the design of post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) where the contribution of India has been minimal at best. India's climate policy and diplomacy need to focus on the links between the negotiations under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and how decisions made there will impact the country's ability to design and deliver action on the SDGs.

Technology transfer and licensing

In 2009, Ecuador introduced a discussion at the UNFCCC on the need to re-look at the issue of technology transfer and intellectual property rights (IPRs) in climate change issues and suggested encouraging compulsory licensing. This suggestion was supported by several developing countries, including India. However, there is no positive movement on this issue either within the World Trade Organization (WTO) or UNFCCC.

With India's experience in dealing with compulsory licensing in the pharmaceutical sector, perhaps it is time for India to share its strategy on this issue with respect to climate change technologies.

Though the issue of compulsory licensing is contentious between developed countries and developing countries, the time has come to direct the negotiations towards human development and national security – including the suffering of millions due to natural disasters due to climate variability.

Though premature, India could potentially initiate a discussion on coming up with a win-win option between patents and compulsory licensing to break the deadlock on this issue.

Such an option could be in the form of 'supplementary licensing' for technologies that contribute to health, food and livelihood securities including preventing natural disasters. It may be prudent to focus on such options and elaborate on how such 'supplementary licensing' could work as a win-win option for both developed and developing countries.

Putting out the cards

One of my favourite phrases when I organize capacity building programmes for multilateral negotiation processes has been, "When a seasoned negotiator sees you drowning 100 feet

away, he or she will throw a rope of about 51 metres and say he or she has come more than half way to save you.”

Current negotiations in climate change have several countries taking this approach.

India needs to work more diligently in the cafes and cocktails during the negotiations in as much as it engages in the plenary hall and ensure its positions are responsive, nuanced and linked to the broader agenda of developing countries. Forming a coalition on key issues is critical as it is important to engage with diverse sectors at home.

Working with alternate options and making critical sound-bites could make India’s position stronger. But these alternate options need to be inclusive, covering sectors where we have strength to link the negotiations with other multilateral processes including WTO and the UN Working Group on SDGs.

Lastly but importantly, India should strengthen its focus on south-south cooperation in time for the Paris summit.

Balakrishna Pisupati is the former chairman of the National Biodiversity Authority. He has been engaged in multilateral environmental negotiations for over 20 years.

Source : <http://www.thethirdpole.net/india-is-unprepared-for-paris-climate-summit/>