

A Green Planet – India leading the way

Climate Change is a defining challenge of our times but as the world hurtles toward an escalating climate crisis, India is stepping into a global leadership role to tackle climate change. Armed with a combination of ambition, innovation, and soft power diplomacy, the country has not only set bold climate commitments but has also delivered on them, emerging as a credible leader on the global stage. India's efforts, grounded in both action and equity, stand as a compelling narrative of how developing countries can balance climate responsibility with economic growth.

Climate Commitments and Credibility

At 2 tonnes, India's per-capita carbon footprint is the lowest among G20 countries, and the International Finance Corporation (IFC) has recognised India as the only G20 economy aligned with the 2°C target. India is the world's largest country in terms of population, comprising around 18% of the global population. It is also the fifth largest economy in the world, on its way to becoming the third largest economy by 2030. Yet, India accounts for only 3.4% of cumulative emissions.

India's climate commitments are ambitious and measurable, providing a benchmark for others to follow. In 2021, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced a five-point action plan, or **Panchamrit**, at the UNFCCC meeting in Glasgow. This included a pledge to achieve net-zero emissions by 2070, install 500 GW of non-fossil fuel capacity by 2030, and ensure that 50% of India's energy needs come from renewable sources by the same year.

India is well on its way to meeting these goals. Between 2005 and 2020, India reduced its emission intensity of GDP by 36%, demonstrating a rare ability to decouple economic growth from greenhouse gas emissions. More than 46% of India's installed electricity generation capacity comes from non-fossil fuel sources, with renewable energy capacity—including large hydropower—reaching 203.22 GW. Forest and tree cover now span 25.17% of India's land, with an additional carbon sink of 2.29 billion tonnes of CO₂ equivalent created between 2005 and 2021.

Soft Power Diplomacy: Building Global Alliances

India's climate leadership is not confined to domestic achievements. The country has harnessed its soft power to create and lead global coalitions addressing critical aspects of climate resilience, energy transition, and sustainability. These initiatives, often operating outside formal UNFCCC negotiations, amplify India's efforts to foster collaborative solutions.

The International Solar Alliance (ISA), launched by India in 2015, exemplifies this leadership. By uniting 104 member countries and 16 signatory countries, primarily in the Global South, the ISA seeks to make solar energy a central solution for sustainable development. Its focus on reducing dependence on fossil fuels and promoting technology transfer has cemented India's role as a champion of equitable energy transitions.

Similarly, the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI), initiated in 2019, addresses the growing vulnerability of infrastructure to climate risks. With 41 member countries and seven organisations, it promotes resilience through practical solutions—a crucial agenda in an era of frequent and devastating climate-induced disasters.

In 2023, during its G20 presidency, India launched the Global Biofuels Alliance (GBA) to accelerate the global adoption of biofuels. With 24 member countries and 12 international organisations, the GBA champions sustainable energy alternatives that reduce emissions while bolstering energy security.

The Leadership Group for Industry Transition (LeadIT), co-founded in 2019, is yet another initiative aimed at decarbonising hard-to-abate industrial sectors. Its 37 members, including countries and corporations, work collaboratively to achieve net-zero emissions in industries like steel and cement by 2050.

India's Mission LiFE (Lifestyle for Environment) further underscores its commitment to behavioural change at both individual and community levels. By encouraging sustainable consumption and production practices, India is not only addressing emissions but also promoting a shift in global attitudes toward environmental stewardship. India's presidency of the G20 also saw the launch of the Resource Efficiency Circular Economy Industry Coalition (RECEIC), an initiative with 39 founding member companies aimed at reducing resource extraction and waste. This focus on circular economies is complemented by domestic efforts such as a green credits programme, right-to-repair initiatives, and updated eco-mark regulations.

A Blueprint for Global South Leadership

India unites countries around shared goals to deliver actionable frameworks addressing real-world challenges. By championing inclusive alliances, India empowers developing countries to participate as equal partners in the global climate dialogue.

With countries in the Global South disproportionately bearing the brunt of climate impacts despite contributing minimally to global emissions, India's efforts also demonstrate that leadership in climate action is not determined by wealth but by vision and resolve.

In a world where trust in multilateralism is eroding, India's ability to bring diverse stakeholders together offers a model for a cooperative, equitable, and sustainable future. As the sun rises on a new chapter in global climate action, India is lighting the way. It is not merely a participant in the global climate dialogue—it is shaping its trajectory. This is leadership by inspiration.

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