



Net zero and climate injustice

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(Mains GS3: Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.)

Context:

- Recently many countries announced net-zero emission targets. This idea of net zero emissions by 2050 is being advocated as a panacea for the evil of climate change.
- While the feasibility and efficacy of such a strategy for all countries is questionable, it also strikes at the root of the basic tenets of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).
- it also undermines the achievement of a climate-just world.

The Paris Agreement:

- The principles of equity and common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities (CBDR-RC) based on historical responsibility have been the bedrock of climate actions under the UNFCCC ever since 1992.
- These are also the central pillars on which India's call for climate justice is premised.
- The Paris Agreement on climate change was a forward march for the global community in many ways.
- Developed countries promised to deliver higher finance commitment by 2025 and a more facilitative technology regime, apart from leading mitigation actions.
- Developing countries agreed to take legal obligation that entails undertaking domestic mitigation measures and reporting on their implementation as part of their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC).

India leads climate justice:

- Climate justice gained traction under the leadership of India at the Paris COP.
- Climate justice inscribed in the preamble of the Paris Agreement based on India's articulation.

- Indian government introduces climate sensitivity in domestic policies through interventions like energy for all, housing for all, health insurance and crop insurance, coupled with calls for action like the “Clean India” and “give it up” campaigns, popularising yoga and sustainable lifestyle practices.
- Together, these initiatives ensure climate justice to the vulnerable and poor sections that are worst hit by climate change.
- While the rich were cajoled to move towards sustainable living, the poor were provided with the safety nets to fight climate change.
- Nowhere else in the world has such an experiment been launched on such a large scale.

Addressing the very essence of idea of justice:

- With India’s efforts, climate justice has now become an important part of the climate change discourse.
- While people in all countries have a sense of justice, which is primarily guided by perceptions and social conditioning, addressing the moral values of justice and fairness in climate change negotiations has been anything but easy.
- In Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle distinguished three forms of justice, namely distributive, commutative and corrective.
- With the onset of the implementation phase of the Paris Agreement, it would be useful to take stock of how well the global community is addressing these three aspects of justice.

Distributive justice:

- Distributive justice pertains to how resources should be distributed in terms of principles of equality, equity and merit.
- For climate change, the most important resource is the global carbon space.
- It is important to note that even though industrialisation in the developed countries is responsible for a large part of the build-up in greenhouse gases which causes climate change, people of the developing countries are suffering disproportionately more from its impacts.
- The developed countries continue to corner a lion’s share of the carbon space for their luxurious consumption while they goad developing countries to cut their emissions emanating from even basic needs.
- The Climate Action Tracker reports that climate action of major developed countries is incompatible with the goals of the Paris Agreement.
- It is only a few developing countries, including India, who are taking adequate climate action.
- Therefore, the focus should be on ensuring ambitious climate action by developed countries in the near-term to ensure distributive climate justice in the implementation of the Paris Agreement.

Commutative justice:

- Commutative justice refers to agreements or commitments, and other kinds of social contracts.
- In the climate change discourse, it would refer to the honouring of past commitments in good faith.
- The Kyoto Protocol adopted in 1997 was a historic turning point with legally binding targets for industrialised countries to reduce overall GHG emissions.
- However, the second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol that commits developed country parties to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 18 per cent below 1990 levels by the year 2020 only entered into force in December 2020, just one day before its expiry.
- Not only were these targets unambitious and grossly inadequate to meet the principal objective of UNFCCC, but several developed countries backtracked and refused to take on any targets in the second commitment period.
- The developed country delivery of finance, technology transfer, and capacity building support to developing countries is also not up to the mark.
- They are not even close to meeting their climate finance goal of jointly mobilising at least \$100 billion per year by 2020 to support climate action in developing countries.
- The fulfilment of these past commitments would be a critical precursor to any enhancement of climate ambition by developing countries.

Corrective justice:

- Finally, corrective justice pertains to the righting of wrongs.
- Climate justice demands that every individual who is born on this earth has a right to development and dignified living.
- For this, developed countries need to repay the climate debt by shouldering greater mitigation responsibilities and providing finance, technology and capacity building support to safeguard the interest of the poor and vulnerable people in developing countries.

Conclusion:

- India and other developing countries have struggled hard to ensure differentiation between the developed and the developing countries and enshrine the principles of equity and CBDR-RC in the Paris Agreement.
- So, while many herald the call for net zero by 2050 as a positive signal in avoiding runaway climate breakdown, in reality it delays climate action by developed countries and is being used to evade historical responsibility and transfer burdens to developing countries.
- It is now time that developed countries rose to the occasion and ensured climate justice by leading climate action responsibly.