INDIA IN GLOBAL CLIMATE NEGOTIATIONS: INSIGHTS FROM BELÉM(COP30)

Abstract

This research paper provides a comprehensive analysis of India's evolving role in global climate negotiations, particularly in the context of the 30th Conference of the Parties (COP 30) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). It traces India's historical trajectory from its initial defensive stance during the Kyoto Protocol era to its current position as a pivotal actor in international climate diplomacy. The paper highlights India's core negotiating principles, including Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR), climate justice, and historical responsibility, which have shaped its advocacy for equitable climate action. The analysis of COP 30 outcomes reveals significant alignments with India's traditional priorities, including enhanced adaptation finance and the establishment of a Just Transition mechanism. However, challenges remain, particularly regarding the need for substantial commitments on loss and damage financing, a clearoperational timeline, technical functions, and defined finance for the just mechanism transition. Ultimately, this paper underscores India's influential role in shaping global climate governance and its implications for achieving effective and equitable climate action.

Keywords:India, climate negotiations,climate justice, COP30, adaptation finance, Just Transition, loss and damage

Introduction

Climate change has emerged as one of the most pressing challenges of the 21st century, requiring unprecedented levels of international cooperation and coordinated action. As the world's most populous nation, the third-largest emitter of greenhouse gases, and a country highly vulnerable to climate impacts, India's role in international climate negotiations carries significant weight for both the Global South and the broader international community (Deepika, 2025).

India's engagement with global climate politics has undergone a remarkable transformation over the past three decades. From its initial position as a defensive voice on the fringes of climate policy during the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, India has evolved into an active shaper of international climate efforts (Mohan, 2022). This transition reflects not only India's changing economic status and growing global influence but also the country's recognition of the urgent need to address climate change while protecting its developmental imperatives (Jha, 2022).

The importance of India in global climate negotiations cannot be overstated. India is home to a substantial percentage of the world's population that is vulnerable to climate change effects, including extreme weather events, water scarcity, agricultural disruptions, and sea-level rise (Deepika, 2025). Simultaneously, as a rapidly developing economy, India faces the dual challenge of lifting millions out of poverty while transitioning to a low-carbon development pathway. This unique position makes India's climate actions influential for global emissions trajectories, food security, and geopolitical dynamics, particularly in the Global South (Deepika, 2025).

India's climate diplomacy has been characterized by its consistent advocacy for principles of equity, climate justice, Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR), and historical responsibility (Zhang et al., 2023; Jha, 2022). These principles have formed the bedrock of India's negotiating positions across multiple Conference of the Parties (CoP) sessions under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). India has played a key role in building coalitions with developing countries to secure commitments from developed nations on emission reductions, climate finance, and technology transfers (Sengupta, 2019).

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach, integrating secondary data from reports of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the World Resources Institute on COP30, peer-reviewed scholarly articles from 2015 to 2025, to identify the pivotal outcomes of CoP30 and analysethem through India’s negotiation lens.

Literature Review

India's participation in global climate negotiations has evolved through distinct phases, each characterized by different strategic approaches, negotiating positions, and levels of engagement. Understanding this historical trajectory is essential for contextualizing India's current role and anticipating its future positions in climate diplomacy.

1. The Kyoto Protocol Era (1997-2005)

The first period of India's climate diplomacy, spanning the 1980s through the adoption of the Kyoto Protocol in 1997 and its entry into force in 2005, was marked by India's role as a champion of the developing world. During this regime creation phase, India played an instrumental role in building coalitions with developing countries to draw clear commitments from developed countries on emission reductions, finance, and technology transfers (Sengupta, 2019).

India's position during this period was that developed countries should bear the bulk of climate responsibility due to their historical emissions, and that any mitigation framework should be based on per capita allocation principles (Mohan, 2017). This position reflected India's fundamental stance that developing nations should only undertake voluntary commitments if they received adequate finance and technology transfers from industrialized nations (Mohan, 2017).

The Kyoto Protocol ultimately exempted India from legally binding emission reduction commitments, an outcome that India viewed as essential for protecting its socio-economic development priorities (Mohan, 2017). During this period, India also pushed for developed countries to take greater responsibility for climate action. Interestingly, while initially skeptical of market-based mechanisms, India reversed its position on the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) in 2002, subsequently engaging actively with the mechanism for project funding and eventually hosting the second-largest number of CDM projects globally (Mohan, 2017).

2. The Transition Period: Copenhagen to Cancun (2009-2010)

The second phase of India's climate diplomacy, from 2005 to 2010, was characterized by transition and contestation. This period saw India demonstrate increased flexibility while simultaneously opposing moves to dilute the concept of differentiated responsibility (Sengupta, 2019). India began putting forth voluntary commitments, signaling a shift from its earlier defensive posture while maintaining its core principles.

During this period, India showed willingness to undertake domestic climate action as a result of its changing economic status (Jha, 2022). This shift reflected India's recognition that its growing emissions and economic power necessitated a more proactive stance, even as it continued to advocate for the developmental needs of the Global South. The transition period demonstrated India's ability to balance its traditional advocacy for developing country interests with pragmatic engagement in the evolving climate regime.

3. The Paris Agreement and Beyond (2015-Present)

The third and most recent phase, from 2011 to 2015 and continuing through the Paris Agreement era, has been marked by significant compromise and strategic repositioning. India adapted to changing negotiation contours that pushed for more symmetrical treatment of developing and developed countries in matters of differentiation (Sengupta, 2019).

The months leading to the Paris Agreement in 2015 witnessed a notable shift in the tone and substance of India's approach to climate negotiations. Following the election of a new government in 2014, India embarked on a series of steps that recast the country as a progressive element in negotiations, moving from "obdurate negotiator" to "part of the solution" (Lavasa, 2019). India's actions included the declaration of ambitious mitigation targets and successful public diplomacy measures (Lavasa, 2019).

At the Paris negotiations, India and other like-minded developing countries successfully negotiated to preserve their room for development and underscore the differentiation in responsibilities based on historical emissions (Lavasa, 2019). The Paris Agreement, as a result, reflects the delicate balance of positions between developing and developed nations, with India playing a crucial role in achieving this balance (Lavasa, 2019).

The post-Paris period has seen India continue to evolve its climate diplomacy. India has transitioned from a protest voice emphasizing CBDR, equity, and historical responsibility for developed nations, to actively shaping global efforts (Mohan, 2017). This evolution reflects a broader foreign policy shift towards global leadership and responsibility, with India accepting voluntary commitments and eventually submitting Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) for clean energy, carbon intensity reduction, and carbon sinks (Mohan, 2017).

India's Key Positions and Principles in Climate Negotiations

India's engagement in global climate negotiations has been consistently guided by a set of core principles that reflect its developmental priorities, historical perspective, and vision for equitable climate action. These principles have remained remarkably consistent even as India's negotiating strategies have evolved over ti

1. Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR)

The principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR) has been the cornerstone of India's climate diplomacy since the early days of international climate negotiations. India has played a key role in establishing and defending this principle, which recognizes that while all countries share responsibility for addressing climate change, developed countries bear greater responsibility due to their historical emissions and greater capacity to act (Jha, 2022), (Sengupta, 2019).

India's negotiations at the United Nations Conference on Climate Change have been firmly based on "equity," "historical responsibility," and the "polluter pays" agenda (Zhang et al., 2023). The country has maintained this position even as negotiation dynamics have shifted toward more symmetrical treatment of developed and developing countries. India has shown flexibility in accepting voluntary commitments while steadfastly opposing moves to dilute the concept of differentiated responsibility (Sengupta, 2019).

The CBDR principle is not merely a negotiating tactic for India but reflects a fundamental understanding of climate justice. India has consistently pleaded that equity is an "inalienable and absolute right" within the UNFCCC framework. This principled stance has positioned India as a leading voice for developing countries in climate negotiations, even as it has demonstrated pragmatism in other aspects of its climate diplomacy.

2. Climate Justice and Equity

Closely related to CBDR, the concepts of climate justice and equity have been central to India's climate diplomacy. India has been a staunch advocate for climate justice within international relations, highlighting the tensions between economic development and environmental sustainability in its domestic and international climate strategies (Deepika, 2025).

India's emphasis on climate justice reflects its position that climate action must be equitable and must not compromise the developmental aspirations of countries that have contributed least to the problem. The country has argued that mobilizing climate finance for meeting the needs and priorities of developing countries must be founded on the principle of climate justice (Saryal, 2025). This position underscores India's view that climate action cannot be divorced from broader questions of global equity and development justice.

The principle of equity extends to India's positions on various aspects of climate negotiations, including mitigation commitments, adaptation support, and financial mechanisms. India has consistently argued that equity must be the foundation for allocating responsibilities and resources in the global climate regime, ensuring that those who have contributed most to the problem and have the greatest capacity to act bear the primary burden of climate action.

3. Historical Responsibility and the Polluter Pays Principle

India's climate diplomacy has been fundamentally shaped by the principle of historical responsibility, which holds that developed countries should bear primary responsibility for climate action due to their historical emissions. This principle is closely linked to the "polluter pays" agenda that has been central to India's negotiating positions (Zhang et al., 2023).

The historical responsibility principle has several important implications for India's negotiating positions. First, it justifies India's demand that developed countries take the lead in emission

reductions and provide financial and technological support to developing countries. Second, it supports India's argument that developing countries should have greater flexibility in their climate commitments to allow for continued economic development and poverty alleviation. Third, it underpins India's position that any global climate framework must differentiate between the responsibilities of developed and developing countries.

India has maintained its stance on historical responsibility even as negotiation dynamics have evolved. At the Paris negotiations, India and other like-minded developing countries successfully negotiated to preserve their room for development and underscore the differentiation in responsibilities based on historical emissions (Lavasa, 2019). This achievement demonstrates India's continued commitment to the principle of historical responsibility and its ability to translate this principle into concrete negotiating outcomes.

The polluter pays principle, closely related to historical responsibility, has also been a consistent element of India's climate diplomacy. This principle holds that those who have caused environmental damage should bear the costs of addressing it. India has argued that this principle should guide the allocation of climate finance and the distribution of mitigation responsibilities in the global climate regime (Zhang et al., 2023).

An Assessment of COP30 Outcomes Through India's Negotiation Principles

COP 30 of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was held in Belem, Brazil, from 10 November to 21 November 2025. is designated as the Global Mutirão: Uniting humanity in a global mobilization against climate change. This significant event coincides with the tenth anniversary of the Paris Agreement. The Environment Minister of India has characterised this conference as the “COP ofImplementation”and “COP of Delivery on Promises”.In the following analysis, I have examined the global mutirão declaration through the lens of India's negotiation principles, specifically focusing on the concepts of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities, Equity, and Climate Justice.

1. Equity and CBDR

The "Global Mutirão"(collective efforts) initiative, as outlined in the declaration, aligns with the principles of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR) and equity by explicitly integrating them into the framework for accelerating climate action and international cooperation.COP-30’s emphasis on differentiated responsibilities, the protection of development space, and the need for finance and implementation aligns closely with India’s traditional stance. India’s public response framed COP-30 as delivering recognition of the disproportionate burden on vulnerable populations and as an incremental victory for climate justice. This alignment reinforces India’s sustained role as a spokesperson for developing countries.

2. Finance: Adaptation, Mitigation Support, and Loss & Damage

India has long demanded scaled finance for adaptation and technology transfer. COP-30’s call to substantially ramp up adaptation finance (tripling by 2035) and its pragmatic approaches to implementation respond to India’s priorities on adaptation and support for vulnerable

populations. India explicitly welcomed these provisions and pushed for developed countries to deliver on finance pledges.

However, notable gaps remain. Analysts observed limited new, predictable, large-scale commitments for loss & damage and disappointment over the absence of immediate, substantial mitigation finance roadmaps. For India, these gaps reflect continued structural tensions: India insists on finance delivery before endorsing tighter mitigation obligations for developing countries. COP-30 moves adaptation finance forward but did not fully resolve India's long-standing demand for "trillions not billions" in guaranteed public finance.

3. Mitigation Ambition and NDCs

India's post-2014 diplomacy has included voluntary mitigation commitments and ambitious sectoral initiatives (e.g., renewables expansion). Yet India consistently resists externally imposed near-term net-zero timetables or binding targets that could constrain development. COP-30's focus on implementation and the Belém mission to boost ambition is politically palatable to India so long as implementation pathways respect development needs and finance flows. The final package did not impose immediate, legally binding mitigation escalators—thus aligning with India's preference for voluntary, nationally determined approaches. But the political pressure to "enable ambition" signals rising expectations that India will continue to raise its mitigation ambition—creating a strategic challenge.

4. Just Transition Mechanism

The establishment of a Just Transition mechanism at COP-30 is a notable convergence with India's domestic and international priorities. India has invoked just transition rhetorically—linking clean energy expansion with jobs, industrial policy, and energy access. The COP-30 decision creates scope for India to shape global norms on industrial decarbonization that account for social protection, technology transfer, and finance—thus turning an area of potential contestation into a platform for India to assert leadership while protecting development space. India explicitly welcomed the mechanism.

5. Loss & Damage and Implementation

India has long advocated recognition and resources for countries disproportionately affected by climate impacts. COP-30 strengthened adaptation and implementation workstreams, but observers criticized the meeting for limited progress on predictable, large-scale loss & damage financing. India's acceptance of incremental implementation mechanisms aligns with its preference for practical, finance-backed measures.However, the slow pace on loss & damage funding remains a point of common concern for India and other developing countries.

Conclusion

COP-30's outcomes largely align with India's historical emphasis on equity, CBDR, and the primacy of finance and implementation. The conference advanced adaptation finance ambition, created a Just Transition mechanism, and launched implementation-oriented missions—things that India welcomed and which reflect long-standing demands. Yet COP-30 did not close the critical finance gap—especially for loss & damage, and while it established a Just transition mechanism, its finance was left open for the next Conference of the Parties.

India's engagement in climate negotiations has evolved significantly, positioning the nation as a pivotal player within the global climate governance framework. The insights gathered from the Conference of the Parties 30 (COP 30) underscore India's commitment to principles such as equity, Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR), and climate justice, which have consistently guided its diplomatic efforts. The outcomes of COP 30, including the emphasis on adaptation finance and the establishment of a Just Transition mechanism, align closely with India's historical advocacy and developmental priorities. However, challenges remain, particularly concerning the financing of loss and damage and the pressure for binding mitigation commitments. As India continues to navigate these complexities, its role will be crucial in shaping future climate action, particularly for the Global South, while balancing its developmental aspirations with the urgent need for effective climate responses.

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