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Climate Change: Institutional Responses and Role

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Introduction:

Climate change emerged as one of the most pressing challenges in international relations at the turn of the century. Every nation has made it its agendato address the issues caused by climate change. There has been a wide consensus and agreement amongst nations and institutionssince the early 1990's that addressing the threats of global warming, rise in temperature, and climate change is the top priority as they have a wideimpact on the living environment, on human activities, and ultimately on the environment.

Given the scope and universality of climate change, the most efficient method of managing its mitigation, adaptation strategies, and mechanismfocus on the relations among nations andthe global level of governance (Luterbacher, 2001). The importance and attention given to this issue have rendered it a key component of international politics. Around the diplomatic circles' concerns for the lands in danger of disappearing below the sea level, the disruption to the water supplies and the food cycle, pollution control, conservation and other environmental problemshave become crucial to modern world politics and academic research (Webersik, 2010). Scholars like Yamin and Depledgeemphasise that the only way to solve global problems like ozone depletion and global warming is through multilateral agreements (Yamin, Depledge, 2004).

Multilateralism in mitigating climate change is further supported by agreements such as the G7, G8, and United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCC). In the last two decades,the institutionalisation of climate change in multilateral organisationshas become the new order of business (Hall, 2015).This can be proven in the increasing number of multilateral organisations, like the World Health Organization (WHO), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and other organisations that institutionalised climate change inside their framework.Additionally, an international civil society campaign for climate justice has been essential in maintaining pressure on governments and international organisations to take action. (Hadden, 2015).The abovementioned organisationsexemplifyhow environmental issues have become part of international politics.

Although most countries have put climate change on their political agenda after the Cold War and received added emphasis in international institutions, however, to date, the goal is nowhere near realisation. It is also true that some of the initial targets have been achieved. Climate control and mitigation are met with challenges, such as a lack of political will, effective international and global governance, and even leadership to tackle this global problem (Gupta and Grubb,2000). The disinterest, lack of action and even denial on the ground level with the people of the world have slowed down critical responses. If no one stands for our environment, then the old classic question may be asked; who speaks for Earth?

This article does not presume to give clear-cut answers to climate change witnessed in the world today. Rather the primary motivation for this paper is to illuminate that the subject of climate change has been established as a key concern in world affairs (Hall, 2016) and to discuss the various methodological approaches tothe issues resulting from global climate change. This will help us comprehend this problem better. A problem that scholars have claimed is a new threat to security (Westing, 1986) to understand which goals have been accomplished and which are still facing challenges. Recognising the connections between international governance and climate change is the first step of action in combating the danger of the present environmental situation.With this background understanding,analysing global environmental policies and making sense of their desirability will be easier.

Climate Change:

A simple explanation of what climate change is can be taken from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) which states that "*Climate change in IPCC usage refers to a change in the state of the climate that can be identified (e.g. using statistical tests) by changes in the mean and/or the variability of its properties, and that persists for an extended period, typically decades or longer. It refers to any change in climate over time, whether due to natural variability or as a result of human activity*" (IPCC, 2007).This definition varies from that of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), where climate change refers to a "*change of climate that is attributed directly or indirectly to human activity that alters the composition of the global atmosphere, and that is in addition to natural climate variability observed over*

comparable time periods" (United Nations Framework Convention On Climate Change 1992).

Many scholars associate climate change with human impacts on Earth. In its simplest sense, climate change is the transformation in the ecosphere, hydrosphere and atmosphere produced by human beings. Crutzentributes the extreme changes with the concept of the Anthropocene. Anthropocene is the changes and modifications to the environment that are brought about by human actions and interferences (Crutzen, 2002). Some human activities include the rapid urbanisation process, uncontrolled population growth, rising demand for food and water that puts pressure on natural resources,agricultural production modifications, and unsustainable production processes polluting natural resources and endangering ecosystems (Elliott, 2011). Deforestation has led to the negative effect oflowering carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gas capture, which in turn have raised the temperature of the Earth exponentially. With the increase in temperature, the glaciers melt and fill the sea. The sea level also rises because of the expansion of water. Many of the islands and lands that lie below sea level are covered by the sea. Human-induced climate-related hazards like cyclones, droughts, and landslides occur more frequently (IPCC, 2012). The destructive effects will expand to incorporate all aspects, from agriculture to disease transmission.

Responses to Climate Change:

There are many levels of responses,whether regional, national, local, or global, where the political processes can be dedicated entirely tomanaging global environmental change. The realist has always followed a statist approach where the state is the main player in the international arena. While this is undoubtedly true to some extent as a sovereignty (in most cases) is vested with the states; however, other non-state actors have also made their entry in the last century, and they are becoming powerful forces to be reckoned with.States remain an important actors as power is vested in their hands. However, there is no way of forcing a state to follow through with its agreements. Implementing these agreements will depend upon the whims and fancies of these states. Although in the past decades, states have taken responsibilityfor carrying out all their environmental goals. This is indeed a positive move forward.

Since the problem is of a global scale, the response should operate in a multi-layered Governancewhich, to be truly successful, extends upward into the global arena (top-down

approach) and below to regions, cities, and communities (bottom-up approach). At the ground level, the most important are the actions of the individuals. To achieve successful climate change mitigation, public members must be on board. Unfortunately, the perception of the public is not accommodating; in most cases, it is climate scepticism. It seems that the general public is in denial of climate change. KirstiJylha states that 'denial'significantly influences how the public views climate change. Why is this so?

In most cases, it can be simply a lack of knowledge and information or maybe ignorance and misunderstanding (Jylha, 2016). On further analysis, the reason for such denial is that climate change will only occur in the future, not the present; it is the faceless enemy that the public cannotrecognise. It is hard to face up to 'elusive and abstract threats' (Giddens, 2009).

Giddens further states that "since the dangers posed by global warming are nottangible, immediate or visible in the day-to-day life, however awesome they may appear, many will sit on their hands and do nothing of concrete about them. Yet waiting until they become visible and acute before being stirred to serious action will, by definitions, be too late". This is referred to as Gidden's Paradox. Most of the 40 countries surveyed agree that climate change is a major issue, and a global median of 54% think it is a very serious one (Wike,2016). Yet, only a few are willing to act against this change. Even politicians and elites often use environment jargon as gestural politics to win an election. This pomp and show promises are immediately forgotten after the win. No one will step up and apply green living to everyday life. It is either too expensive or too difficult to adapt. On a suggestion to resort to carpooling or use of electric cars or a change in extravagant living, the answer is invariably one of the following: "let others do it first" or; "nothing I do as a single individual will make any difference" or even; "I'll get round to it sometime". It will have been too late when they eventually get around to doing it.By then, there will be widespread flooding, strange weather, rising sea levels, and higher temperatures.It will be beyond our help and too late to react at this stage. Therein lies the paradox that Giddens talks about.

International Response to Climate Change:

International Organisations and Institutions are at the forefront of climate change. It is agreed thatthe problem of climate change extends beyond environmental concerns; it is also a political and security concern. It has risen to the top of all the agendas of

international meetings- a scenario quite different from the 1980s, where it was just one in a long list of environmental issues. The international actors acknowledged their duty to protect the environment for the first time at the Stockholm Environmental Conference in 1972 (Falkner, 2012).At the 1992 Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit, states raised concerns aboutenvironmental issues like the ozone layer, pollution, desertification, climate change etc. G7 and G8 demanded more action against 'global climate change, air, sea and freshwater pollution, acid rain, hazardous substances, deforestation, and endangered species'Glover,2016). However, climate change was one of the most significant global environmental issues during the latter two decades of the 20th centuryand not a stand-alone priority issue.

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)became openfor signatures in 1992. Right from its birth,its goal was to maintain greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would shield the climate system from harmful disruption. (G8, 2005). The Conference of Parties COP, an annual negotiation, was first held in Berlin in 1995, and the main commitment waslowering emissions.The UNFCCC institutionalised climate change and served as the only forum for States to talk and discuss strategies for reducing the world's rising greenhouse gas emissions.

The 1997 Kyoto Protocol is a facet of the UNFCCC.This protocol contained legally binding commitments to restrict emissions and reduce their intensity. With America opposing and announcing that it does not want to be part of the Kyoto Protocol and its cut in the emission of greenhouse gases and the European States willing to engage in the policies and yet not as committed, the Kyoto Protocol had limited successes which led to its amendment in the Doha in 2012.Under the protocol, the world is now in its second period of commitment.

The new century ushered in a new devotion to climate change mitigation, as was witnessed in the G8 summit agenda in Gleneagles, where there was a common plan of action to 'tackle climate change' (G8, 2007).At the U.N. General Assembly in 2007,many countries agreed that climate change could be a security risk. When "usual" political issues give way to a "matter of security of the utmost importance", politics changes significantly. (Oswald, 2009).World leaders' biggest meeting to discuss the environmentwas the 2009 UNFCCC summit in Copenhagen. The UNFCCC-COP, at Cancun 2010, Durban 2011, Doha 2012

and Warsaw 2013,markedmultilateral engagements in the negotiation where programmes and policies on mitigations and adaptations were developed.

One of the most important and meaningfulsteps to stop climate change is the UNFCCC's 21st Conference of Parties (COP-21) held in December in Paris. It set up a national climate plan to keep the rise in temperature to less than 1.5 degrees Celsius and make it easier to deal with the effects of climate change.It also sets up a financial flow and support to ascertain nations meet their goals of building a clean and resilient future. This conference also stressed the importance of collective action to tackle a global threat. The President of COP 21, Laurent Fabius, declared, "The Paris Agreement allows each delegation and group of countries to returnhome with their heads held high. Our collective effort is worth more than the sum of our effort. Our responsibility to history is immense" (Paris Agreement, 2015). This was further highlighted by U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, who, in his speech, stated, "We have entered a new era of global cooperation on one of the most complex issues ever to confront humanity. For the first time, every country in the world has pledged to curb emissions, strengthen resilience and join in a common cause to take common climate action. This is a resounding success for multilateralism " (Paris Agreement Summit, 2015)

The Paris Conference should mark the beginning of a long and effective global effort, not its end. The world has just started working collectivelyfor an all-encompassing strategy to address environmental concerns to safeguard the environment and the planet's future.The UNFCCC and the Kyoto Protocol aim to address the problem of how climate change policies related to other international agreements.

There are many campaigns all around the world that aims at tackling climate change. There are demonstrations against the destruction of mines, the cutting of forests, the construction of dams, and other extractive projects. (Sosa-Nunez and Atkins, 2016). Also, numerous arguments have been made for using geoengineering techniques like stratospheric aerosol injection to artificially alter the Earth's temperature (Burns and Strauss, 2013). In layman's understanding, stratospheric aerosol injection delivers precursor sulphide gases into the stratosphere, such as sulphur dioxide, hydrogen sulphide, or sulfuric acid, thatcan reduce the impact of climate change brought on by rising levels of greenhouse gases and provide a worldwide dimming effect. According to David G Victor and M Granger Morgan, "one kilogram of well-placed sulfur in the stratosphere would roughly offset the warming effect

of several hundred thousand kilograms of carbon dioxide"(Victor et al., 2009). Many are critical of modifying the Earth's temperature by this method,seeing it as a bad idea that can exacerbate the problem.However, decision-makers have considered "geoengineering" as a last resort to cool the globe and stop the increase in temperature.

Conclusion:

Until now, there have been setbacks for climate change to be considered within the policy framework. Moving it from the periphery to the centre of policy regimes makes it often more difficult to achieve projects and policies that span wider geographical reaches. Also,reaching a consensus becomes complicated when more parties are affected and involved. The world has only sat up and taken notice of climate change as late as the 1990s. We are only at the beginning of transforming political and economic practices. Hence even with all the political attention and resources received, a resolution for climate change has not been found. The only positive step forward is to combine all global efforts.

In most cases, it is seen that all the climate change policies and goals are based on deprivations. Individuals are expected to reduce and reduce many activities to reduce carbon emissions. Some expectations include cutting back on air travel, driving more economical cars, reducing electric and energy consumption, walking more often, etc. Individuals are not willing to sacrifice so much to adapt to climate change goals. Giddens argues that finding a more rewarding model than just depriving is necessary. Encouraging the youths to follow a more sustainable and environmentally friendly lifestyle, such as the generation of more job opportunities and public recognition and awards, will lead to better and more effective actions.

There is a high degree of consensus and agreement between scientists, politicians and the intelligentsia that climate change's dangers are real and human activities cause it. This problem is global and needs to be tackled globally with every level of governance taking part. It needs to be beyond political jargon and grandiose and move from academia and scholarly research to practical on-the-ground commitments. Climate change mitigation is not real until it is seen in the streets. People have to wake up or fall trappedinGidden's paradox, where upon waking, they find themselves in a world where they are rendered helpless of any action. Citizens need to be afraid of the changes, yet fear should not be the only motivator to respond. Fortunately,state actors and international organisations in the international sphere have made climate change their top priority. Discussion and debates

can lend an additional comprehension of how and why the global community should try to reevaluate its perceptions of climate change and strategies for reduction and adaptation (Sosa-Nunez and Atkins, 2016).It is of utmost importanceto investigate the growing role of multilateral actions and partnerships in developing international relations regarding climate change.Multilateral Agreements like the Paris Agreement must only be the beginning; many more are yet to come.

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