

India's Evolving Position in International Climate Governance: From the Paris Agreement to Contemporary Climate Diplomacy (2015–2026)

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Abstract

Climate change has emerged as one of the most pressing global governance challenges of the twenty-first century, requiring coordinated international responses that reconcile environmental sustainability with economic development. Since the adoption of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 1992, international climate negotiations have evolved considerably through the Kyoto Protocol, the Paris Agreement, and subsequent Conferences of the Parties (COPs). Within this evolving framework, India has played an increasingly significant role by advocating equity, climate justice, and the principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities (CBDR-RC), while simultaneously expanding its domestic climate commitments and international leadership.

This paper analyses India's evolving position in international climate governance from the Paris Agreement (2015) to 2026. Building upon the author's original seminar paper, it examines how India's climate diplomacy has shifted from primarily defending developmental concerns towards combining normative principles with pragmatic leadership. It argues that India has successfully balanced its developmental priorities with increasing global climate responsibilities through renewable energy expansion, voluntary climate commitments, the International Solar Alliance (ISA), Mission LiFE (Lifestyle for Environment), the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI), and the National Green Hydrogen Mission.

The paper further examines India's domestic climate policies, international diplomatic initiatives, climate finance priorities, technology transfer concerns, and role within multilateral institutions such as BASIC, BRICS, G20, and the UNFCCC. While India's climate governance has demonstrated significant progress, important challenges remain regarding climate finance, adaptation, energy transition, and equitable implementation of international commitments. The study concludes that India's climate diplomacy increasingly reflects a synthesis of climate justice and practical leadership, positioning the country as one of the principal actors shaping future global climate governance (IPCC, 2023; UNFCCC, 2015; Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change [MoEFCC], 2022). The analytical framework developed in this article builds directly upon the author's earlier seminar paper while updating it to reflect developments through 2026.

Keywords: Climate Governance, India, Paris Agreement, Climate Diplomacy, CBDR-RC, Climate Justice, Renewable Energy, Sustainable Development, International Solar Alliance, Mission LiFE

1. Introduction

India's climate diplomacy cannot be understood solely through the lens of environmental policy. Instead, it must be examined within the broader context of foreign policy, economic development, energy security, and international political economy. Over the past three decades, India has sought to reconcile its developmental aspirations with its responsibilities as an emerging global power. This balancing act has become increasingly significant as expectations regarding India's contribution to global mitigation have grown alongside its expanding economy.

A notable feature of India's climate diplomacy has been its ability to maintain continuity in its normative principles while demonstrating flexibility in policy implementation. During the early years of climate negotiations, India primarily emphasized the historical responsibility of developed countries and the developmental needs of the Global South. Following the Paris Agreement, however, India gradually adopted a more proactive approach by proposing constructive international initiatives rather than merely responding to proposals advanced by developed countries. This evolution reflects India's transformation from a defensive negotiator to a policy innovator within global climate governance.

India's leadership is now reflected through initiatives such as the International Solar Alliance (ISA), Mission LiFE (Lifestyle for Environment), the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI), expansion of renewable energy, and the National Green Hydrogen Mission. These initiatives demonstrate that India increasingly views climate governance not only as an environmental obligation but also as an opportunity to promote sustainable economic growth, technological innovation, and South–South cooperation.

Despite these achievements, several challenges remain. India's rapidly growing energy demand, dependence on coal for electricity generation, vulnerability to climate-induced disasters, financing requirements, and technological constraints continue to shape domestic policy choices and international negotiating positions. Consequently, India's climate governance represents an ongoing process of balancing competing priorities rather than choosing between development and environmental protection.

1.1 Research Gap

Existing literature has extensively examined India's historical negotiating positions within the UNFCCC framework, particularly its emphasis on equity, CBDR-RC, and climate justice. However, relatively fewer studies comprehensively analyse India's evolving climate diplomacy after the Paris Agreement by integrating domestic policy reforms, international leadership, renewable energy expansion, and recent diplomatic initiatives into a single analytical framework.

Furthermore, many earlier studies conclude around the adoption of the Paris Agreement or focus exclusively on mitigation commitments. They do not fully capture India's subsequent transformation through initiatives such as Panchamrit, Mission LiFE, the Green Hydrogen Mission, the CDRI, and India's leadership within the G20 and the Global South. This paper seeks to address that gap by extending the analysis through 2026 while building upon the conceptual framework established in the author's original seminar paper.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The study has the following objectives:

1. To examine the evolution of international climate governance from the Rio Earth Summit to recent COP negotiations.

2. To analyse the evolution of India's climate diplomacy from Paris (2015) to 2026.
3. To evaluate India's normative and pragmatic approaches to international climate governance.
4. To assess India's domestic climate policies and their contribution to international commitments.
5. To identify emerging challenges and future prospects for India's climate leadership.

1.3 Research Questions

The study addresses the following research questions:

1. How has India's position in international climate governance evolved since the Paris Agreement?
2. To what extent has India balanced developmental priorities with global climate commitments?
3. What explains India's transition from a defensive negotiator to a proactive climate leader?
4. What opportunities and challenges are likely to shape India's future climate diplomacy?

1.4 Research Methodology

The paper adopts a qualitative, analytical, and descriptive research methodology. It is based primarily on the author's original seminar paper and presentation materials, supplemented by official policy documents, reports of international organizations, government publications, and recent academic literature.

Primary emphasis is placed upon official documents published by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the Government of India, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC), the International Energy Agency (IEA), the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), and peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2021 and 2026. Comparative and thematic analysis is employed to evaluate the evolution of India's climate diplomacy.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The study contributes to the growing literature on climate governance by providing an updated assessment of India's evolving role within the international climate regime. It demonstrates how India has combined traditional principles of equity and climate justice with practical initiatives aimed at promoting renewable energy, sustainable lifestyles, disaster resilience, and South–South cooperation. The findings are relevant for scholars of international relations, political science, environmental governance, public policy, and sustainable development.

2. Literature Review

Climate governance has emerged as one of the most dynamic areas of research within international relations, environmental politics, and global public policy. The evolution of the international climate regime has generated extensive scholarly debate concerning burden-sharing, climate justice, state sovereignty, sustainable development, and the effectiveness of multilateral environmental agreements.

One influential body of literature focuses on the development of the global climate regime under the UNFCCC. Scholars argue that climate governance evolved from legally binding commitments under the Kyoto Protocol towards a more flexible, nationally determined framework under the Paris Agreement. While the Kyoto Protocol emphasized mandatory emission reduction targets for developed countries, the Paris Agreement introduced a universal yet nationally differentiated approach through Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). This transition has significantly altered the dynamics of climate diplomacy by encouraging broader participation while relying more heavily on national implementation and periodic review.

A second strand of scholarship examines the principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities (CBDR-RC). Many scholars regard CBDR-RC as the normative foundation of international climate governance because it recognizes both the shared responsibility of all states to address climate change and the unequal historical contributions to greenhouse gas emissions. For developing countries, particularly India, this principle remains essential for ensuring fairness, developmental justice, and equitable access to atmospheric resources.

Climate governance has increasingly been recognized as one of the most complex areas of global governance because it requires cooperation among sovereign states possessing widely differing historical responsibilities, economic capacities, technological capabilities, and developmental priorities. Unlike conventional environmental problems confined within national boundaries, climate change represents a transboundary challenge requiring collective action under multilateral institutional frameworks. Consequently, scholars argue that effective climate governance depends not merely upon legal obligations but also upon political trust, financial cooperation, technological innovation, and institutional capacity (Bodansky, 2016; Keohane & Victor, 2016).

The establishment of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 provided the institutional foundation for international climate governance. Subsequent agreements, including the Kyoto Protocol (1997) and the Paris Agreement (2015), progressively expanded participation while modifying the nature of state obligations. The transition from legally binding emission reduction targets under Kyoto to nationally determined contributions (NDCs) under Paris reflects a broader shift toward flexible, participatory climate governance that accommodates differing national circumstances (UNFCCC, 2015).

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has played an equally significant role by providing scientific assessments informing international negotiations. The IPCC Sixth Assessment Report (AR6) concludes that climate change is unequivocally caused by human activities and emphasizes the urgency of rapid, sustained, and deep reductions in greenhouse gas emissions across all sectors (IPCC, 2023). These scientific findings increasingly influence both international negotiations and domestic climate policies.

Climate justice constitutes one of the most influential normative concepts within contemporary climate governance. The literature argues that climate change is not merely an environmental issue but also a question of distributive justice because countries contributing least to historical emissions frequently experience the greatest climate vulnerability. Developing countries therefore emphasize that climate policies should account for historical responsibility, developmental inequalities, and differentiated capacities.

India has consistently supported this perspective. As emphasized in your mother's seminar paper, India's negotiating position has remained firmly anchored in the principles of equity, CBDR-RC, and the right to development, arguing that industrialized countries possess greater obligations due to their historical emissions and higher economic capabilities.

Scholars further distinguish between inter-generational equity, referring to obligations owed to future generations, and intra-generational equity, referring to fairness among present populations. Both concepts strongly influence India's climate diplomacy, particularly regarding access to atmospheric carbon space, sustainable development, and poverty eradication.

The literature on India's climate diplomacy has evolved considerably over the past three decades. Earlier scholarship frequently portrayed India as a defensive negotiator primarily concerned with protecting developmental interests. Indian negotiators consistently opposed attempts to impose mandatory emission reduction obligations upon developing countries while advocating greater financial and technological support from developed nations.

However, more recent scholarship identifies significant changes following the Paris Agreement. Researchers increasingly argue that India has transitioned from a reactive negotiator toward a constructive global climate leader. This transformation is reflected through initiatives such as the International Solar Alliance, Mission LiFE, the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure, and expanded renewable energy investments.

This changing role corresponds closely with the conceptual framework developed in your mother's presentation, which describes India's transformation from a "nay-sayer to agenda setter" and highlights increasing international influence on domestic climate policy.

Rather than abandoning its traditional principles, India has broadened its diplomatic strategy by combining climate justice with practical policy innovation. Contemporary scholarship increasingly characterizes India's climate diplomacy as balancing national developmental priorities with expanding international responsibilities.

The relationship between climate governance and sustainable development has received increasing scholarly attention. Earlier environmental debates often portrayed economic development and environmental protection as competing objectives. More recent research argues that sustainable development requires integrating economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental sustainability within a unified policy framework.

India's climate policies increasingly reflect this integrated approach. Renewable energy expansion, electric mobility, climate-resilient agriculture, sustainable urbanization, and green hydrogen initiatives simultaneously contribute to economic development, energy security, employment generation, and climate mitigation. This integrated perspective aligns closely with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted in 2015.

Renewable Energy and Energy Transition

Renewable energy has become one of the defining features of India's climate strategy. Numerous studies identify India's rapid expansion of solar and wind energy as among the most significant developments within contemporary global energy transitions.

The establishment of the International Solar Alliance represents an important innovation because it extends India's domestic renewable energy policies into international climate diplomacy. Similarly, recent scholarship emphasizes India's increasing investments in battery storage, green hydrogen, electric mobility, and resilient infrastructure as evidence of expanding climate leadership.

At the same time, researchers acknowledge continuing challenges associated with coal dependence, energy affordability, industrial competitiveness, and ensuring a just transition for workers and communities dependent upon fossil fuels.

3. Contribution of the Present Study

The present study seeks to address these gaps by extending the analysis of India's climate diplomacy through 2026 while preserving the analytical foundations established in the author's original seminar paper and presentation.

Unlike earlier studies, this article argues that India's climate governance should be understood through a dual framework combining normative principles—equity, climate justice, CBDR-RC, and the right to development—with pragmatic leadership demonstrated through renewable energy expansion, international institution-building, climate adaptation initiatives, and constructive multilateral diplomacy.

Accordingly, the study contributes to both academic scholarship and policy debates by presenting an updated, comprehensive assessment of India's evolving role in international climate governance.

4. India's Normative and Pragmatic Approaches to International Climate Governance

India's approach to international climate governance has undergone a significant transformation over the past three decades. While the country's climate diplomacy continues to be rooted in the principles of equity, climate justice, sustainable development, and Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities (CBDR-RC), it has increasingly embraced a pragmatic approach characterized by constructive engagement, institution-building, technological innovation, and voluntary climate action. This dual strategy has enabled India to safeguard its developmental priorities while simultaneously emerging as one of the leading actors in global climate governance. Your mother's original presentation introduced this distinction between the normative and pragmatic dimensions of India's climate diplomacy, providing the conceptual framework on which this chapter builds.

Normative approaches in international relations focus on principles, values, ethical obligations, and ideas that guide state behaviour. In the context of climate governance, India's normative approach is based upon the belief that climate negotiations should be guided not only by environmental objectives but also by fairness, historical responsibility, distributive justice, and developmental equity.

Since the establishment of the UNFCCC in 1992, India has consistently argued that developed countries bear greater responsibility for climate change because they contributed the majority of historical greenhouse gas emissions during the process of industrialization. Consequently, these countries possess a greater obligation to undertake ambitious emission reductions and to provide climate finance, technology transfer, and capacity-building support to developing countries (UNFCCC, 1992; Paris Agreement, 2015).

India has therefore consistently defended the principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities (CBDR-RC). This principle recognizes that although climate change represents a shared global challenge, countries possess unequal historical responsibilities and differing economic capacities. India's negotiating position maintains that climate governance should respect these differences while enabling developing countries to pursue poverty eradication and sustainable development.

The concept of climate justice has become another central component of India's normative diplomacy. Climate justice argues that those least responsible for climate change often suffer its most severe consequences. India has repeatedly emphasized that climate policies should therefore promote fairness, inclusive development, and equitable access to financial and technological resources. This perspective aligns closely with the arguments developed in the original seminar paper, which highlighted the relationship between environmental sustainability and developmental justice.

4.1 Equity and the Right to Development

India's emphasis on equity extends beyond historical emissions. Indian policymakers argue that developing countries continue to face pressing developmental challenges, including poverty, energy access, infrastructure deficits, food security, and employment generation. Consequently, climate commitments should not impose constraints that hinder socio-economic development.

The principle of the right to development therefore occupies a central place in India's climate diplomacy. Rather than viewing development and environmental protection as contradictory objectives, India argues that sustainable development integrates economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental sustainability.

This position has allowed India to advocate ambitious climate policies while simultaneously expanding renewable energy, promoting green technologies, and improving energy efficiency. Thus, India's normative framework seeks to reconcile developmental aspirations with increasing climate ambition.

4.2 India's Pragmatic Climate Diplomacy

While normative principles continue to shape India's negotiating positions, recent years have witnessed an increasingly pragmatic orientation. Pragmatism refers to policy approaches emphasizing practical solutions, institutional innovation, technological cooperation, and constructive engagement.

Rather than limiting its role to defending developing-country interests, India has increasingly proposed international initiatives capable of addressing common climate challenges. This transformation illustrates India's evolution from a defensive participant toward an agenda-setting leader in international climate governance.

One of the most significant examples is the establishment of the International Solar Alliance (ISA). Launched jointly by India and France in 2015, the ISA seeks to promote affordable solar energy, technological cooperation, capacity building, and renewable energy investments among countries located within the tropical region. The initiative has strengthened India's international reputation as a provider of climate solutions rather than solely an advocate of differentiated responsibilities.

Similarly, the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI) demonstrates India's commitment to enhancing resilience against climate-induced disasters. By encouraging international cooperation in infrastructure planning, risk reduction, and climate adaptation, the CDRI extends India's climate diplomacy beyond mitigation toward comprehensive resilience-building.

4.3 Mission LiFE and Behavioural Change

An important innovation in India's recent climate strategy is Mission LiFE (Lifestyle for Environment). Introduced internationally by India, Mission LiFE argues that technological innovation alone cannot adequately address climate change. Sustainable lifestyles, responsible consumption patterns, and behavioural change among individuals and communities constitute equally important dimensions of climate governance.

Mission LiFE therefore broadens conventional climate diplomacy by integrating environmental ethics, public participation, and sustainable consumption into international climate policy. This initiative reflects India's effort to contribute new normative ideas while simultaneously advancing practical solutions.

4.4 Renewable Energy and Green Development

India's renewable energy strategy represents one of the clearest examples of the convergence between developmental objectives and climate governance. Over the past decade, India has significantly expanded investments in solar, wind, hydroelectric, and bioenergy sectors while simultaneously improving energy access for millions of citizens. The rapid growth of renewable energy has reduced dependence on imported fossil fuels, strengthened energy security, generated employment opportunities, and contributed to national commitments under the Paris Agreement (International Energy Agency [IEA], 2024; International Renewable Energy Agency [IRENA], 2024).

The announcement of the National Green Hydrogen Mission further demonstrates India's commitment to long-term decarbonization. Green hydrogen is expected to support emission reductions in hard-to-abate sectors such as steel, fertilizers, heavy transport, and shipping while creating new opportunities for technological innovation and industrial competitiveness. From a diplomatic perspective, the Green Hydrogen Mission positions India as an emerging supplier of clean energy technologies and strengthens its contribution to global energy transitions.

India has also promoted sustainable infrastructure, electric mobility, battery manufacturing, and energy-efficient technologies. These initiatives illustrate that India's climate policy is increasingly integrated with industrial policy, economic modernization, and sustainable development rather than being treated as an isolated environmental agenda.

4.5 India's Leadership in Multilateral Climate Institutions

India's pragmatic climate diplomacy is further reflected in its growing leadership within multilateral institutions and international coalitions.

Within the UNFCCC, India continues to advocate equitable implementation of the Paris Agreement while participating actively in negotiations concerning adaptation, transparency, finance, and carbon markets. India remains an influential member of the BASIC grouping (Brazil, South Africa, India, and China), which coordinates negotiating positions among major developing economies.

India has also expanded its engagement through BRICS, the G20, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), and other multilateral platforms. During its G20 Presidency, India emphasized the theme "One Earth, One Family, One Future," linking sustainable development with inclusive climate governance and encouraging cooperation among developed and developing countries.

The country's diplomatic initiatives increasingly extend beyond traditional negotiations to include technology partnerships, disaster resilience, renewable energy cooperation, climate adaptation, and South-South cooperation. Such initiatives demonstrate India's evolution from a participant in global climate governance to an institution-builder and agenda-setter.

4.6 Climate Finance and Technology Transfer

Climate finance remains one of the most contentious issues within international climate governance. India has consistently maintained that ambitious climate action in developing countries depends upon predictable financial assistance, affordable technology transfer, and enhanced capacity building. The UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement recognize that developed countries should continue supporting developing countries in implementing mitigation and adaptation measures. India has repeatedly argued that commitments concerning climate finance must be honoured in order to ensure equitable implementation of global climate agreements (UNFCCC, 2015).

India further emphasizes that intellectual property barriers, unequal access to advanced technologies, and limited financial resources constrain climate action within many developing countries. Consequently, international cooperation should facilitate access to renewable energy technologies, resilient infrastructure, adaptation measures, and low-carbon industrial development.

Recent discussions concerning the operationalization of the Loss and Damage Fund, Article 6 carbon markets, and reforms of multilateral development finance institutions have reinforced the importance of climate finance within global climate governance. India continues to advocate that financing mechanisms should prioritize equity, accessibility, transparency, and the needs of vulnerable developing countries.

4.7 India's Role in the Global South

India increasingly positions itself as a leading representative of the Global South within climate negotiations. This role reflects India's historical commitment to South–South cooperation, equitable development, and inclusive multilateralism.

India's climate diplomacy emphasizes that developing countries should not be required to sacrifice poverty eradication, food security, healthcare, education, or infrastructure development in pursuit of global mitigation objectives. Instead, international cooperation should support sustainable development pathways that simultaneously reduce emissions and improve human well-being.

Initiatives such as the International Solar Alliance, Mission LiFE, the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure, and expanded technical cooperation with developing countries demonstrate India's efforts to translate normative principles into practical international partnerships.

This leadership has enhanced India's credibility within multilateral negotiations and strengthened its influence among developing countries seeking balanced and equitable approaches to climate governance.

India's dual approach—combining normative principles with pragmatic policy innovation—represents one of the most distinctive features of its contemporary climate diplomacy.

The normative approach provides moral legitimacy by emphasizing climate justice, equity, CBDR-RC, and sustainable development. These principles continue to guide India's negotiating positions and reinforce its leadership among developing countries.

The pragmatic approach complements these principles by demonstrating that India is willing to undertake ambitious domestic action while proposing constructive international initiatives. Renewable energy expansion, the International Solar Alliance, Mission LiFE, CDRI, the Green Hydrogen Mission, and climate-resilient infrastructure illustrate India's increasing capacity to shape global climate governance through practical leadership.

Nevertheless, challenges remain. India continues to face rising energy demand, dependence on coal, adaptation costs, financing constraints, technological gaps, and the need to ensure a just transition for workers and vulnerable communities. Balancing rapid economic growth with long-term decarbonization will therefore remain a central challenge in the coming decades.

Overall, India's evolving climate diplomacy demonstrates that normative commitments and pragmatic action are not mutually exclusive. Instead, the country's experience suggests that principles of equity and climate justice can coexist with ambitious domestic reforms and constructive international leadership.

5. India's Participation since Paris Agreement, COP 21

The adoption of the Paris Agreement at COP21 represents one of the most significant milestones in the history of international climate governance. Unlike the Kyoto Protocol, the Paris Agreement established a universal framework in which all Parties submit Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) while progressively increasing ambition over time.

The Agreement aims to: Limit the increase in global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels; Pursue efforts to limit warming to 1.5°C; Enhance adaptation and climate resilience; Align financial flows with low-carbon and climate-resilient development; and Establish transparency and accountability mechanisms through regular reporting and global stocktakes.

India strongly supported the adoption of the Paris Agreement because it retained the principle of CBDR-RC while providing flexibility through nationally determined contributions. India emphasized that climate action should remain consistent with national development priorities and that developed countries should continue fulfilling commitments related to finance, technology transfer, and capacity building.

5.1 India's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)

Following the Paris Agreement, India submitted ambitious Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). These included commitments to: Reduce the emissions intensity of GDP; Increase the share of installed electricity capacity from non-fossil fuel sources.

Create additional carbon sinks through afforestation and forest conservation.

These commitments reflected India's belief that climate action should complement rather than hinder sustainable development. Unlike mandatory emission reduction targets imposed under earlier negotiations, the NDC framework allowed India to pursue ambitious climate action while retaining policy flexibility.

In 2022, India updated its NDCs to strengthen its mitigation targets in line with the commitments announced at COP26. This demonstrated India's willingness to progressively enhance climate ambition while remaining consistent with developmental objectives.

5.2 Glasgow Conference (COP26, 2021)

The Glasgow Climate Conference represented another major turning point in India's climate diplomacy. During COP26, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced the Panchamrit (Five Nectar Elements), outlining India's long-term climate vision.

The Panchamrit commitments include:

Achieving 500 GW of non-fossil electricity capacity by 2030; Meeting approximately 50 percent of electricity requirements from renewable sources; Reducing cumulative projected carbon emissions by one billion tonnes before 2030; Reducing emissions intensity of GDP by 45 percent compared with 2005 levels; and Achieving net-zero emissions by 2070.

These announcements significantly enhanced India's international standing. Rather than merely defending historical principles, India demonstrated concrete long-term commitments while emphasizing that developed countries should continue supporting developing nations through finance and technology transfer.

COP26 also highlighted India's leadership in promoting Mission LiFE (Lifestyle for Environment), emphasizing behavioural change, sustainable consumption, and environmentally responsible lifestyles alongside technological solutions.

5.3 Sharm el-Sheikh Conference (COP27, 2022)

COP27 focused extensively on adaptation, climate finance, and addressing losses and damages experienced by vulnerable countries.

One of the most important outcomes was the agreement to establish a Loss and Damage Fund, acknowledging that vulnerable countries require financial assistance to recover from climate-related disasters that cannot be addressed solely through adaptation measures.

India welcomed this development while reiterating its long-standing position that developed countries should fulfil historical responsibilities by providing adequate climate finance and technology transfer.

India also emphasized: Equal priority for adaptation and mitigation; Climate justice; Energy security; Sustainable lifestyles; Inclusive global climate governance. These positions closely align with recommendations contained in your mother's seminar paper, which argued that adaptation should receive equal importance alongside mitigation.

5.4 Dubai Conference (COP28, 2023)

COP28 produced the first Global Stocktake under the Paris Agreement, evaluating collective progress toward long-term climate goals.

The conference emphasized: Accelerating renewable energy deployment; Improving energy efficiency; Transitioning away from fossil fuels in energy systems; Scaling up climate finance; Strengthening adaptation efforts. India supported these objectives while emphasizing that energy transitions must remain equitable, inclusive, and nationally determined. Indian representatives argued that developing countries require flexibility in choosing appropriate pathways toward low-carbon development and that climate policies should not undermine poverty eradication or economic growth.

5.5 Emerging Developments (2024–2026)

The period following COP28 has witnessed increasing attention toward: Operationalizing Article 6 carbon markets; Green hydrogen; Critical minerals; Climate-resilient infrastructure; Artificial intelligence for climate adaptation; Nature-based solutions; Climate finance reforms; Just energy transition.

India has continued expanding renewable energy capacity, implementing the National Green Hydrogen Mission, promoting Mission LiFE, strengthening carbon market mechanisms, and positioning itself as a leading voice of the Global South. During its G20 Presidency and subsequent international engagements, India emphasized "One Earth, One Family, One Future," linking sustainable development with equitable climate governance and reinforcing multilateral cooperation.

The evolution of international climate governance demonstrates a gradual transition from legally binding obligations for a limited number of developed countries toward broader participation through nationally determined contributions and collaborative implementation.

India's own evolution mirrors this transformation. While continuing to advocate equity, CBDR-RC, climate justice, and sustainable development, India has increasingly assumed a proactive leadership role through renewable energy expansion, innovative multilateral initiatives, and constructive diplomacy. This evolution reflects a broader shift from norm entrepreneurship to policy leadership, positioning India as one of the principal actors shaping contemporary international climate governance.

6. Major Challenges

6.1 Balancing Economic Development and Climate Action

India remains one of the fastest-growing major economies in the world, with continuing priorities relating to poverty eradication, employment generation, industrialization, urbanization, and infrastructure development. Consequently, climate policies must be designed in ways that do not undermine developmental objectives.

Balancing rapid economic growth with ambitious climate commitments represents one of India's most significant policy challenges. Although renewable energy capacity has expanded substantially, fossil fuels—particularly coal—continue to play an important role in ensuring affordable and reliable electricity. A rapid transition without adequate planning could affect energy security, employment, and industrial competitiveness.

Therefore, India's climate strategy must continue integrating sustainable development with long-term decarbonization rather than treating them as competing objectives (IPCC, 2023).

6.2 Climate Finance

One of the most persistent concerns within international climate negotiations is the availability of climate finance. Developing countries require substantial financial resources for: Renewable energy expansion; Climate adaptation; Disaster resilience; Sustainable infrastructure; Green technologies; and Capacity building.

India has consistently argued that developed countries should fulfil their commitments under the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement by providing predictable, transparent, and accessible climate finance. Delays in mobilizing financial resources limit the pace of climate action and increase implementation challenges. Although multilateral development banks, climate funds, and private investment have expanded, financing gaps remain substantial.

6.3 Technology Transfer

Technological innovation is essential for achieving low-carbon development. However, developing countries often encounter obstacles relating to: High technology costs, Intellectual property rights, Limited research infrastructure, and Capacity constraints

India has repeatedly emphasized that affordable access to environmentally sound technologies should form an integral component of international climate cooperation. Strengthening partnerships involving research institutions, universities, industries, and international organizations will therefore remain critical.

6.4 Climate Adaptation

India is among the countries most vulnerable to climate change. Increasing frequency and intensity of: Heatwaves, Cyclones, Floods, Droughts, Glacier retreat and Sea-level rise pose significant risks to agriculture, public health, biodiversity, infrastructure, and livelihoods. While considerable attention has traditionally focused upon mitigation, adaptation requires equally sustained investments.

Future adaptation policies should emphasize: Climate-resilient agriculture; Water resource management; Coastal protection; Urban resilience; Early warning systems; Disaster preparedness

6.5 Institutional Coordination

Climate governance involves multiple ministries, departments, state governments, scientific institutions, private enterprises, and civil society organizations. Although institutional mechanisms have strengthened considerably, coordination challenges remain. Improved integration among sectors such as: Energy, Transport, Agriculture, Urban development, Water resources and Disaster management will enhance policy effectiveness and reduce duplication.

6.6 Just Energy Transition

India's transition towards a low-carbon economy should remain socially inclusive. Millions of people continue to depend directly or indirectly upon fossil fuel industries. A just transition therefore requires: Employment diversification, Skill development, Social protection, Regional economic development and Inclusive policy planning. Ensuring fairness during the energy transition will strengthen both political legitimacy and long-term sustainability.

7. Future Prospects

Despite these challenges, India's future prospects within international climate governance remain highly promising. India's Renewable Energy Leadership possesses exceptional potential for: Solar energy, Wind energy, Green hydrogen, Battery manufacturing, Offshore wind, and Renewable technology exports. Continued investments could position India among the world's leading clean-energy economies.

The National Green Hydrogen Mission offers opportunities to: Decarbonize heavy industries; Expand clean energy exports; Reduce fossil fuel imports; Create green employment; and Promote technological innovation. India could emerge as a major global hub for green hydrogen production and exports.

Emerging Digital Climate Governance technologies including: Artificial Intelligence, Satellite monitoring, Remote sensing, GIS, Big data analytics and Internet of Things can substantially improve climate monitoring, disaster management, agricultural planning, and environmental governance. Digital innovation will increasingly shape future climate governance.

As a leader of Global South, India's historical commitment to equity, climate justice, and sustainable development positions it uniquely to represent the interests of developing countries. Future leadership may be strengthened through: South-South cooperation, Technology partnerships, Renewable energy diplomacy, Capacity building, and Climate adaptation initiatives. India can continue serving as an important bridge between developed and developing countries.

India is likely to play an increasingly influential role within: UNFCCC, G20, BRICS, BASIC, International Solar Alliance and Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure. These institutions provide opportunities to shape future global climate governance.

8. Policy Recommendations

Based on the foregoing analysis, the following policy recommendations are proposed:

Strengthen implementation of India's Nationally Determined Contributions through improved monitoring, transparency, and institutional coordination.

Accelerate renewable energy deployment while ensuring energy affordability and grid stability.

Expand investments in green hydrogen, battery storage, electric mobility, and emerging clean technologies.

Strengthen climate adaptation through resilient agriculture, water conservation, disaster preparedness, and climate-resilient infrastructure.

Promote Mission LiFE by encouraging behavioural change, sustainable consumption, and environmental awareness.

Enhance climate finance through innovative public-private partnerships, green bonds, international cooperation, and multilateral development banks.

Strengthen research collaboration among universities, research institutions, industries, and government agencies to support evidence-based policymaking.

Promote South–South cooperation through technical assistance, renewable energy partnerships, and capacity-building programmes.

Develop a comprehensive strategy for a just transition that protects workers, vulnerable communities, and regional economies.

Continue advocating equity, CBDR-RC, and climate justice while simultaneously expanding India's constructive leadership within global climate governance.

9. Conclusion

This study has examined India's evolving position in international climate governance from the Paris Agreement to contemporary developments through 2026. Building upon the analytical framework presented in the author's original seminar paper and presentation, the research demonstrates that India's climate diplomacy has evolved from a predominantly defensive negotiating strategy into a more proactive, constructive, and globally influential approach.

India's climate diplomacy continues to be firmly rooted in the principles of equity, climate justice, sustainable development, and Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities (CBDR-RC). At the same time, the country has demonstrated increasing leadership through initiatives such as the International Solar Alliance (ISA), Mission LiFE, the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI), the National Green Hydrogen Mission, and ambitious renewable energy expansion.

The analysis indicates that India's contemporary climate strategy successfully combines normative commitments with pragmatic policy innovation, enabling the country to reconcile developmental priorities with growing international responsibilities. This dual approach has enhanced India's credibility within multilateral negotiations and strengthened its influence among both developed and developing countries.

However, achieving long-term climate objectives will require continued progress in climate finance, technology transfer, adaptation, institutional coordination, and implementation. Ensuring a just, equitable, and inclusive transition toward a low-carbon economy will remain essential for sustaining both domestic support and international credibility.

Looking ahead, India is well positioned to emerge as one of the principal architects of future global climate governance. Through continued investment in clean energy, technological innovation, resilient infrastructure, international cooperation, and equitable multilateral diplomacy, India can make a substantial contribution to achieving the objectives of the Paris Agreement while simultaneously advancing sustainable development.

Overall, this study concludes that India's evolving climate diplomacy represents an important model for balancing environmental responsibility with developmental aspirations. As global climate governance enters a new phase of implementation and enhanced ambition, India's experience demonstrates that principles of equity, climate justice, and sustainable development can coexist with proactive international leadership, making the country an indispensable actor in shaping a more resilient, inclusive, and sustainable global climate order.

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