

Bridging Policy and Implementation: The Twin Tracks of Climate Action



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“Solutions to the climate crisis are within reach, but in order to capture them, we must take urgent action today across every level of society.” – Al Gore, former US Vice President, renowned climate activist, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize (2007), and Founder and Chairman of the Climate Reality Project.

The official theme of the World Environment Day (WED) this year is "*Inspired by Nature. For Climate. For Our Future*", while the Campaign Message is *#NowForClimate*. Perhaps nothing could be more appropriate than this theme and these messages at a moment when humanity as a global community, and planet Earth as the only human habitat in the infinite universe, are at a crossroads, not only because of increasing climatic risks but also as a result of our failure to address the climate crisis to the desired extent.

The social and political conflicts around the globe, resulting in wars and other acts of violence, have also worsened climate and environmental catastrophes by causing huge volumes of additional greenhouse gas emissions, widespread destruction and degradation of natural ecosystems, and toxic pollution of land, water, and air.

This is the eighth occasion since the inception of the UN-led global event in 1974 that it has been observed on the issue of climate change. The earlier campaigns were: *Global Warming; Global Warning* (1989); *Climate Change: Need for Global Partnership* (1991); *Melting Ice - a Hot Topic* (2007); *Kick the Habit - Towards a Low Carbon Economy* (2008); *Your Planet Needs You - Unite to Combat Climate Change* (2009); *Raise Your Voice, Not the Sea Level* (2014); and *Beat Air Pollution* (2019).

It is because of such intensive efforts by global agencies, national governments, and local organizations and communities that awareness about climate change—the causes, consequences, and ways of mitigation and adaptation—has spread to every nook and corner of the world.

At present, reducing the concentration of greenhouse gases and adapting as effectively as possible to the adverse impacts of climate change are the two principal objectives so that the adverse impacts of climate change on water, food, health, nutrition, livelihoods, and the environment can be minimized within stipulated timelines, both at international and national levels.

Multilateral and global agreements, protocols, and consensual decisions promoted by the United Nations, its organs, and other agencies have paved the way for coordinated actions aimed at facilitating mitigation and adaptation through scientific research, technology development and transfer, and adequate funding for the transition from a fossil fuel-based economy to an environmentally sustainable and socially just low-carbon economy.

Globally, the formidable challenges that humanity is facing at present are unchecked greenhouse gas emissions, uncontrolled temperature rise, unprecedented extreme weather events leading to catastrophic flash floods and heat waves, loss of biodiversity, food, water and livelihood insecurity, growing inequality and inequity in economic development across the world, and the economic and political hurdles stalling the global transition to renewable energy. It is now evident that the world is unlikely to limit global warming to below 1.5°C, which was the primary target of the Paris Agreement.

In India, increasing severity of heat waves, droughts, floods and cyclones owing to atmospheric warming, extreme monsoon variability, large-scale glacial melting affecting the Himalayan river basins, and coastal erosion and salinization are some of the major problems that people are suffering from.

The blistering summer heat, with temperatures often rising to the range of 45–50°C in northwestern, central, eastern, and southern regions, has become a seasonal disaster that is slowly gripping even a historically cooler and climatically pleasant region like Northeast India. The annual loss and damage attributable to climate impacts in macroeconomic terms is about 1.5% to 2% of India's GDP (equivalent to ₹5.18 lakh crore to ₹6.91 lakh crore), out of which losses due to extreme weather events amount to about ₹0.96 to ₹1.15 lakh crore annually.

The northeastern states of India have been found to be highly vulnerable to climate change, and Assam, having over 60% of the country's most vulnerable districts, is one of the most affected states along with Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh. Monsoon rainfall has been decreasing significantly across several northeastern states, including Assam, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland, and Tripura since the beginning of the 1990s. Floods, riverbank erosion, landslides, hailstorms, forest fires, lightning, and land degradation due to river-borne sedimentation are well-known climate-induced disasters affecting the region, while the magnitude, scale, frequency, and adverse impacts of such calamities are on the rise due to climate change.

Assam is slowly transforming from a traditional flood-prone state into an increasingly drought-affected state, thus creating a cycle of sequential climatic hazards throughout the year. The districts of Biswanath Chariali, Lakhimpur, Sonitpur, Bongaigaon, Bajali, Dhubri, and Sivasagar have suffered more in terms of droughts in recent times. Assam has 23 districts that rank among the 50 highest flood-risk districts in India, whereas 8 of the 50 most drought-prone districts in the country also belong to Assam. Loss of biodiversity, growing threats to the survival of wildlife and their habitats, and increasing insecurity of climate-dependent livelihoods are also affecting the state in many perceptible ways.

India's climate policy is strongly founded on the nine missions of the National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC), complemented by other national initiatives such as the National Green Hydrogen Mission, PM Surya Ghar: Muft Bijli Yojana, Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), the Net Zero Pledge by 2070, clean mobility drives such as the FAME Scheme (Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Electric Vehicles), and CAFE Norms (Corporate Average Fuel Economy). India is also steering several global programmes such as the International Solar Alliance (ISA), the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI), and the Global Biofuel Alliance (GBA).

Under these commitments, the country aims to bring down the emissions intensity of its GDP by 47% by 2035 compared to 2005 levels; achieve 60% cumulative electric power installed capacity from non-fossil fuel-based energy resources by 2035; and create an additional carbon sink of 3.5 to 4.0 billion tonnes of CO₂ equivalent through expanded forest and tree cover by 2035.

However, the real challenge lies not merely in policy formulation but in translating policy commitments into measurable actions on the ground. Bridging this gap between policy and implementation is critical for achieving climate resilience and sustainable development.

The State Action Plans on Climate Change (SAPCCs) of the northeastern states provide state-level climatic scenarios, assessments of climate impacts and risks, and elaborate action plans for mitigation and adaptation, which are useful knowledge resources for initiating actions on the ground. To ensure that these plans reflect India's current global commitments and national policies, all northeastern states must update their SAPCCs to conform to NDC 3.0 (2031-2035).

For Assam, where an updated SAPCC 2.0 (2021–2030) is already in place, several initiatives undertaken during the last three years indicate the state government's seriousness in pursuing climate action to fulfil the country's climate goals. Initiating green budgeting, climate tagging of the state budget, mandatory allocation of funds for climate resilience and risk mitigation measures, preparation of district-level climate action plans, drafting a cooling action plan and an energy action plan for the state, piloting decentralized renewable energy projects, and strengthening urban climate monitoring are all welcome steps.

Given the prevailing scenario presented above, this is high time that we recognize the climate crisis as one of the most profound challenges confronting humankind's survival and sustenance. In the national context, how we tackle climate change will determine the future of our economy, environment, and our transition to becoming a developed nation by 2047.

Locally, what we do on the ground in our communities, organizations, and institutions through planned actions for effective mitigation and adaptation will determine how smartly we can deal with climate impacts, minimize risks, and embark upon a path of resilience for all. Climate action is the key to our survival and well-being across global, regional, national, and local contexts.

At Aaranyak, we have been addressing major climate issues pertinent to Northeast India in general and Assam in particular through a holistic and institutionalized climate action agenda for over two decades.

Studying climate variability and change, assessing climate and disaster risks, documenting adaptation practices of local communities, imparting awareness, education and training on climate issues, and policy advocacy are some of the activities that we regularly carry out through the 'Water, Climate and Hazard Division'. We have implemented projects on flood early warning systems, mitigation of water scarcity, and climate-resilient agriculture through field-level interventions.

It is noteworthy that Aaranyak successfully led a project on 'Community-Based Flood Early Warning System' in Assam in collaboration with the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), Kathmandu, during 2010-2016. This project won the prestigious 'Lighthouse Activity Award' in 2014 from the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), Bonn, Germany, under its Momentum for Change Programme. It was recognized as a best practice in climate change adaptation using Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). The award was presented to the project at COP-20 in Lima, Peru, in December 2014.

Partha Jyoti Das

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