



An Indian Perspective to the Historical COP28: Reviewing Success and Failures of Climate Crisis Mitigations

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Abstract

Conference of Parties (COP) is an international climate conference organized every year to determine climate mitigation avenues and deliberate on the possible opportunities and routes of climate crisis management. India has been an active member of COP Nations since COP1 itself wherein it had made its agenda clear. The current review article provides an overview of the historical incidences that led to the onset of COP and presents a synopsis of the major events during COP meetings till the current meeting in Dubai also known as COP28. India hosted the COP8 in New Delhi and through its connection with COP, has always kept its stand very clear. The article also evaluates the outlook of India in the recent COP28. During COP28, India has asserted its commitment to the mitigation of climate calamity but has also underlined the abiding principles of its climate diplomacy. This stand comes in contrast to the growing tendency observed in the climate movement to ignore the principles of Common But Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR). Further, the present review also discusses the perspective of the world during COP28 and comments on the expectations from COP's future meetings.

Keywords: COP, India, United Nations, Climate Mitigation

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Introduction

The world has joined hands to witness the historical Conference of Parties, COP28, the annual United Nations (UN) Climate Change Conference taking place in Dubai from 30 November to 12 December 2023. The conference was first held in 1995 in Munich, Germany (UNFCCC, History of the Convention, 2023). A total of 27 COP meetings have been held since then till date. Many local leaders in Dubai are already making it clear that they expect ambitious climate action from their nations since the UN's annual climate conference officially opened on Thursday, November 30 (UNFCCC, unfccc.int/news, 2023). Even if it means going against the wishes of the fossil fuel industry. The motto of this year's conference is "Unite, Act, and Deliver" (Dr. Sultan Al Jaber, 2023).

COP is organized annually to ascertain the progress of climate mitigation and discuss the possible routes available in the need of climate crisis. This is where the world joins together to address critical issues such as limiting the global temperature rise, helping vulnerable communities, and planning for Net Zero by 2050. COP28 has been attended by over 70,000 delegates, including world leaders of 198 parties, business leaders, climate scientists, journalists, stakeholders, and experts from varied fields (UNFCCC, unfccc.int/news, 2023).

In the current article, the history of COP has been discussed and the Indian perspective along with global expectations from the ongoing COP28 has been discussed to illuminate the possible directions for future COP meetings.

Historical perspective on COP

Margaret Thatcher, the former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom addressed the United Nations (UN) in 1989 and raised concerns about climate change at the assembly. She emphasized the threat posed by climate change to the planet and why immediate action needs to be taken to deter the crisis. It was Thatchers' proposal that, the United Nations should work as an umbrella organization to secure worldwide agreements to mitigate the effects of Climate Change, draw regulations to prevent the thinning of ozone, and protect the endangered species of the planet (Margaret Thatcher Foundation , 1989). The initiative by Thatcher was backed by political

heads of state of those times including George Bush Sr., then President of the US. In 1992, he outlined his initiatives 'Clear Skies' and 'Global Climate Change' to the world (Bell, 2021).

By the end of the 1980s, the threat of climate change had finally been acknowledged by the globe due to rampant global temperatures which were setting new records (Maslin, Climate change: a very short introduction, 2021). These political outbursts rekindled our interest in climate science and assisted in improving our knowledge regarding the changes in carbon dioxide levels through recorded history. With the advent of better computing capacities, simulation modeling assisted in helping us understand the anthropogenic contributions to climate change (Maslin, Lang, & Harvey, A short history of the successes and failures of the international climate change negotiations, 2023). The discovery of the Ozone Hole in May 1985 and the sequential studies about the phenomenon further galvanized the movement of climate awareness (Farman, Gardiner, & Shanklin, 1985). By the beginning of the 1990s, though still disputed, climate change had become an issue of concern (Oreskes & Conway, 2012).

This uprise resulted in the formation of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in 1988. IPCC released its first scientific report on climate change and mitigation in 1990 (IPCC, 1990). Two years later, in 1992, with unanimous support from world leaders, the UN held the Rio Earth Summit to help member nations protect the environment and promote sustainability. The significance of the summit was in the fact that it led to the Rio Declaration and Global sustainability initiatives called Agenda 21 and Forest Principles.

The Summit was a significant event and led to the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, the local, national, and global sustainability initiative called Agenda 21 and Forest Principles (Gupta, 2014). Rio Summit also signified another achievement in the Climate Movement. It was the first time that multiple parties across the globe signed up for the UNFCCC - United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change to negotiate the limits of Green House Gas Emissions. Further, parties also joined the Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD) and the Convention to Combat Desertification initiatives of the United Nations.

Though countries joined the UNFCCC in 1992 to combat climate change and to limit the ever-raising global temperatures, Climate Change had already started to show considerable effects, and coping with the impact of the climate crisis has become inevitable for humanity. In 1995,

negotiations were launched to strengthen global response, and on 11th December 1997, the Kyoto Protocol was signed by 84 parties. The Kyoto Protocol was a monumental achievement in the climate movement as it legally bound the signing parties to reduce emissions. This marked the third year of COP and was known as Kyoto COP3. The first COP was held in 1995 in Berlin, Germany and since then, COPs have been held in different cities in Europe, America, Africa and Asia. Table 1 summarizes the milestone decisions from the history of COP.

Table 1: Milestone COPs in the History of COP

Year	COP	Location	Milestones
1995	COP1	Berlin	At the first conference, the signatory countries agree to meet annually to keep global warming under control and warn of the need to reduce emissions of polluting gases.
1997	COP3	Kyoto	The Kyoto Protocol is adopted with a commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in industrialized countries.
2002	COP8	Delhi	Delegates agreed on principles for the financing of a fund to help the poorest nations cope with the effects of climate change. The parties approved a mechanism to incorporate forest protection into the effects of the international community to combat climate change.
2007	COP13	Bali	A timetable is set for negotiations on a new international agreement to replace the Kyoto Protocol and include all countries, not just industrialized countries.
2009	COP15	Copenhagen	It sets a goal of keeping global warming below 2°C and developed countries commit to long-term financing for developing countries.
2010	COP16	Cancun	The Cancun Agreements are drafted, formalising the commitments made in Copenhagen, and the Green Climate Fund is established, especially for climate action in

			developing countries.
2012	COP18	Doha	It is agreed to extend the Kyoto Protocol until 2020. Some countries such as the US, China, Russia and Canada did not support the extension.
2015	COP21	Paris	The Paris Agreement to keep global warming below 2°C compared to the pre-industrial era and to continue efforts to limit it to 1.5°C is unanimously adopted.
2016	COP22	Marrakesh	The Paris Agreement enters into force after being ratified by the majority of countries

India's Stand at COP

India hosted the COP8 in 2002. During the early years of COP, very few officials from the attending Nations and their Environmental ministers were present for the event, but the stance in India has continued (Monish, 2016). In COP1 itself, India has implied that the reduction in emissions needs to be initiated by the developed countries so that necessary space for development would be available for the developing nations of the world. Decades later, at the COP28 currently underway in Dubai, India's stand remains the same.

During COP28, India has asserted its commitment to the mitigation of climate calamity but has also underlined the abiding principles of its climate diplomacy. This stand comes in contrast to the growing tendency observed in the climate movement to ignore the principles of Common but Differentiated responsibilities (CBDR).

CBDR stands for Common but Differentiated Responsibilities. The concept of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR) has been enshrined as Principle 7 of the Rio Declaration at the first Rio Earth Summit in 1992. It is the principle of international environmental law that requires all countries to take responsibility for global environmental destruction. However, not every country can be held equally responsible. The principle of CBDR recognizes that high levels of carbon dioxide emissions fuel the growth of developed countries. Therefore, they need

to shoulder a greater share of responsibility in dealing with climate change (United Nations, 2013). Hence, the differences associated with CBDR are in turn interconnected to the Global Parties' contributions to pollution and their capacities and capabilities to address, these problems. Simply put, the CBDR criteria suggest that rich nations that benefited more economically from the Industrial Revolution than the rest of the world should pay more to clean up the environment and leave some carbon space for emerging economies and developing countries. Convincing the privileged few as well as industrialized and economically advanced countries to adhere to such principles has been the biggest battle for Indian climate negotiators in the last two decades.

The concept of CBDR answers the friction between two archaic notions pertaining to environmental crisis mitigation. One is the school of thought which proposed that climate crisis was a 'Common Responsibility' and part of the 'Common Heritage of Mankind'. This ideology emerged in the 1967 UN Resolution as an expression of concern regarding biodiversity and natural resource loss which belonged to the mankind as a whole. The 1992 UN Negotiations cited the need for global interventions and a collective response to mitigate climate change consequences. This eventually brought the idea of 'Common Responsibility' to the foreground. On the other hand, the establishment of strata through which various nations can enter the idea of collective response was also acknowledged in the 1972 UN Conference itself.

The Indian delegation emphasized that though equal participation is the need of the hour, the rights of the parties especially from the developing world need to be protected (The Indian Express, 2023). The Hon'ble Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi emphasized in his address that India has achieved its emission targets close to eleven years in advance and is on track to achieve Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) as per the Paris Pact. He further reiterated the commitments of the Nation towards renewable energy (Press Information Bureau, Government of India, 2022).

It was revealed during the COP28 discussions that, India has been striking a balance between the economy and environment as though the nation houses 17% of the world's population, it contributes less than 4% to global carbon emissions. India has achieved its fossil fuel target almost 9 years ahead of schedule and emission intensity target 11 years ahead of schedule (Press Information Bureau, Government of India, 2023). Other goals include projected emissions



reductions of one billion tonnes and 500 giga watts of non-fossil fuel energy capacity by 2030. India is also set to achieve its target goal of Zero Emissions by 2070 (Press Information Bureau, Government of India, 2023). But, as minerals continue to be an important factor in India's energy issues, India has yet to find a solution to coal. Due to low per capita energy availability, India needs a variety of electricity options to alleviate poverty and improve the quality of life of 1.4 billion people (Alind & In. The Indian Express, 2023).

The perspective of the World –COP28; History in the making

The world's leading oil producers, including the United States, have unveiled new plans to significantly reduce methane emissions during COP28. This event is considered to be possibly the most impactful action in the history of the United Nations Climate Change Conference, or COP (Groom & Valcovici, 2023). The deal would essentially commit the world's 50 largest oil companies, including state-owned giants like Saudi Aramco and corporate super-giants like ExxonMobil, to nearly zero methane emissions from their drilling and production operations (Ugal, 2023) (Kennedy, Dlouhy, & Ainger, 2023). However, the agreement is still considered unclear and controversial as none of the oil giants have committed to reducing oil and gas production. The agreement also includes new regulations from the US government and other countries to hold these companies to their promises and international monitoring efforts. Sultan Al Jaber, the Emirati oil executive who has chaired the COP28, has been claimed to have pressurized companies to sign an international agreement to show that the oil and gas industry has also responded to climate change. As part of the agreement, companies are agreeing to stop flaring waste-only gas at their well sites by 2030 (The World Bank, 2023). This process is known as flaring and the excess air released during the production of residual oil is burned. The agreement also commits companies to effectively zero all greenhouse gas emissions from their operations from 2050 onwards (International Energy Agency, 2023).

COP28 has presented a focused approach to methane because it is a very important air pollutant commonly emitted from industrial activities. Over the years of research, it has been noted that this once-neglected gas is much more potent as a greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide (Environmental Defence Fund, 2023). IPCC reports that methane emissions need to fall sharply

to meet the ambitious goal of the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement and if we are to stop warming from exceeding 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels.

For the oil-rich United Arab Emirates, COP28 has become a great platform to demonstrate that oil and gas can play an important role in powering the world, even in an era of fossil fuel-driven climate change. According to EDF, currently, 2 to 3 percent of all gas produced by the oil and gas industry leaks directly into the atmosphere, contributing to global warming. Under the agreement, companies cannot keep those emissions to more than 0.2 percent of their production (Environmental Defence Fund, 2023).

COP – Expectations from the Future

The last 30 years of Human civilization and development have seen the anthropogenic emission of CO₂ doubled. This indeed marks a collective failure of the world leaders in mitigating the ever-increasing climate crisis. However, the initiation of sound climate negotiations and positive changes to the global economy, coupled with a favorable political disposition can be seen as a positive change to keep the predicted levels of global warming significantly below 4°C by the end of the century. Unfortunately, based on the NDCs made at the Glasgow COP26, even in the situations where all the NDCs are fulfilled, it has been estimated that global warming would be kept between 2.4°C and 2.8°C (Maslin, Lang, & Harvey, A short history of the successes and failures of the international climate change negotiations, 2023). Thus, despite the progress made thus far, negotiations and climate mitigation strategies may be still considered a political failure as climate change impacts and climate catastrophes have been observed to be ever-increasing and civilization is nowhere near its posted target of keeping global warming at just 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. Protecting the world's ecosystems will help safeguard the world's climate.

But it needs to be acknowledged that, few underestimate how difficult, and important, it is to negotiate Greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction at the multilateral level. Thus, the success of COP28 so far cannot be neglected. But securing progress has always been painstakingly slow and slow but steady mitigation strategies would be needed as we soon reach the target year of 2030. The avoidance of extreme global warming is a success that should be acknowledged though we still have a long way to go to avoid major impacts of climate change.

Conclusion

For years, the developing world has been demanding a better flow of finance and green technology, but so far what it has received from the West has been insufficient. Looking at the current situation, it seems that a small section of humanity has destroyed nature and the whole of mankind is paying the price. But once again it is clear that protecting the environment is not only the responsibility of the government or the rich or the industrial sector but it is the responsibility of each one of us because we have only one earth.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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