

## Climate Change

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# Climate Change and Global Environmental Politics: North-South Divide

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Environmental degradation due to climate change has become a global concern. There is no scope for disputes over the impacts of climate change on human species and the planet. Recently, a new debate has come to prominence, with regard to setting standards for environmental protection between the developed and the developing countries, and also in identifying the prime culprit for environmental degradation. The debate between the developed and the developing countries – to identify, limit and minimise the ever-increasing threat of global climate change – is often known as the North-South debate in global environmental politics. Human activities such as industrialisation, consumerism, burning of fossil fuels, tropical deforestation and ever-increasing use of automobiles are strongly connected with environmental degradation as these contribute to the production of greenhouse gases (GHGs), which in turn accelerates climate change. On a general note, the poor developing South has made little contribution to the environmental degradation when compared to the developed, highly industrialised global North. However, the impacts of environmental degradation are multi-dimensional. Even though both the wealthier and poorer States suffer from climate change, the poorer South is most vulnerable to this entire environmental phenomenon. Therefore, the bigger questions in global environmental politics are: who is supposed to take the responsibility for climate change, who will be setting the standards for controlling the emissions of ever more GHGs, and how can the necessary actions be implemented to protect and control the environment?

The developed countries have a high level of consumption of energy resources because of their luxurious lifestyle. A United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report states that there are “more than 900 cars per thousand people of driving age in the US, more than 600 in Western Europe and fewer than 10 in India”.<sup>1</sup> In America, there are more than two televisions on average per house; in Liberia and Uganda less than 1 house in 10 has a television. In the richest countries, average *per capita* water consumption per day is 425 litres, in the poorest it is 67.<sup>2</sup> An industrialised country like the US emits four times more CO<sub>2</sub> than China and India, and about 30 times more than Kenya. The average British lifestyle generates more GHGs in two months than a least developed country will take a year to produce.<sup>3</sup> With increasing awareness and increased visibility of the problem, many States have

stepped forward to reduce their emissions and take control of the increasing threat of global climate change. It is at this juncture that the responsibility and the contribution of developing and poor countries have become prominent. Many developing States observe that the North is highly developed and therefore it is their primary responsibility to reduce the GHG emissions as they have already produced such huge amounts of GHGs. On the other hand, there should be more flexibility for the South in terms of using resources as it is their right to be developed and as their emission rate is comparatively low. However, the North denies this, highlighting that the factors which differentiate the situations of developing countries with the developed North are not the same but different. For example, according to the developed North, the major factors that differentiate the two regions are poverty, poor environmental education, lack of awareness and development in the South, and that these are primarily responsible for environmental pollution and degradation.<sup>4</sup> Thus, developed countries state that the global South is equally responsible for climate change and should be held equally accountable for the problem. This paper examines the North versus South debate in global environmental politics, and blends this issue with related literature and information, hopefully shedding more light on this seemingly intractable problem.

## Understanding the North-South Debate of Global Environmental Politics

The “North-South” divide, signifying the differences between the more industrialised economies of the global “North” and the relatively less developed and developing countries of the global “South”, has continued to be a defining feature of global environmental politics.<sup>5</sup> Generally, the global North includes the US, Canada and Western Europe, the developed part of Asia, Australia and New Zealand. The global South is made up of regions such as Africa, Latin America and developing Asia including the Middle East.<sup>6</sup> The former mostly covers the West and the developed world while the latter category largely corresponds with the developing and poor regions. Considering geographical location, developing countries – global South – are primarily located in sub-tropical or tropical ecosystems and the developed countries – global North – occupy mainly temperate and arctic climates and ecosystems.<sup>7</sup> The division between the North and the South based on their economies, political stability, technology, scientific research and other factors are very persistent. In addition to these geographical, political and economic factors,

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environmental politics and climate change have become a more significant issue of debate between the two regions. The Kyoto Protocol of 1997<sup>8</sup> (which entered into force in 2005) reinforced the clear division between Annex I (developed countries) and non-Annex I (developing nations) Parties.<sup>9</sup> Inequality and justice have been central issues at every major environmental conference since the 1972 UN Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm, Nairobi in 1982, Rio de Janeiro in 1992, Rio+5 in New York; and Johannesburg in 2002.<sup>10</sup> At all these conferences, and particularly in the Kyoto Protocol, it was recognised that the developed countries are mainly liable for the present high levels of GHG emissions in the atmosphere as a result of more than 150 years of industrial activity. Thus they are bound to tackle this problem as the Protocol puts an excessive burden on developed northern nations under the principle of “common but differentiated responsibilities”. Even so, powerful industrialised developed countries are not willing to accept the responsibility and have refused to curtail their own excesses unless poor nations did the same. Thus, the debate between the North and the South regarding environmental politics has become prominent, intensified and still prevailing.

Moving away from defining the North-South debate as a simple rich-poor divide, Dauvergne suggests that, “the distinction is not only about the different environmental priorities of the North and the South; it is about the different ultimate goals that each seeks from the global environmental politics”.<sup>11</sup> The northern view is that the defining goal of the enterprise is to improve the state of the global environment. The southern view defines the central problem as the uneven, unfair and inappropriate state of the global system and particularly of North-South relations. These two competing views reflect the different “northern” and “southern” perspectives on global environmental politics that Dauvergne considered as the North-South debate.<sup>12</sup>

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the world is still sharply polarised between the industrialised, rich North and the less developed, impoverished South. According to Tuna, “the emergence of environmental scarcities has added a new controversy to the longstanding debate over the structure of relationships between the North and the South”.<sup>13</sup> From the southern point of view, environmental issues are just another means for developed countries to continue to control and exploit the economies of less developed countries, while the northern perspective suggests that environmental threats could be used as an opportunity for global cooperation.<sup>14</sup> The countries of the South have become increasingly intolerant of the world order and wish to be as industrialised and rich as the North. This will, in turn, result in a massive increase in consumption and subsequent further degradation of the environment. Besides, many northern States are not accepting responsibility for the current high level of GHG emissions as being entirely due to their long-term industrial activities. Developed nations of the North believe that the developing South should raise their national standards to the same or similarly stringent

levels as theirs. Conversely, the developing countries consider that this requirement is unfair and suspect that this environmental standard is being used by the North to keep the South at a competitive disadvantage. Many southern States and stakeholders argue that if the South is to stay accountable and remain within the standards required by the North, the northern regions should transfer enabling technology and offer financial assistance to the South.

Based on the above discussion, one can infer that the North-South debate, which was grounded on economic division, has become a “blame game” over who is responsible for GHG emissions and for minimising the problem, rather than oriented towards positive action. Neither the North nor the South is ready to take responsibility and be accountable for the degrading environment. The problem is that the North does not want to accept responsibility for the environmental destruction caused by their previous industrial activities, and are putting pressure on the South to be careful about environment degradation. On the other hand, the stakeholders and leaders of the South have been ignoring environmental concerns in many ways. The main focus of the South is to be industrialised and developed. This research is not opposing the need for industrialisation and the development agenda of the South but is questioning and considering the negative cost that such development might bring if proper action is not taken. The stakeholders and the leaders in the South should think about the environmental cost of development and industrialisation, the long-term effect of development on the environment, and who are going to be the victims of environmental degradation as a result of their economic development.

### Key Actors in the North-South Debate

Other actors – particularly national and international environmental organisations – are the main focus of this section. It identifies their role: to settle the North-South debate. As claimed by Park and Roberts,<sup>15</sup> “actors always aspire to increase their ‘degree of freedom’ that is, to somewhat influence to their advantage the rules”. The emission of GHGs varies in different parts of the world, and the task is not the same for all State actors, as we have seen in the previous discussion. It is evident that the State actors are greatly influenced by non-State actors such as international institutions or organisations in the debate of environmental protection and other related issues. Finger<sup>16</sup> argued in this connection that “[t]he basic building blocks of organizational theory are actors and rules that shape actor behavior. Such actors are characterized by their strategic behavior, as well as by the fact that they pursue specific goals”. States that are vulnerable to climate change, when active in global environmental politics, are pressuring for more suitable solutions. Betsill *et al.* state that, “While it is true that the 1960s and 1970s were a period of profound theoretical debates, important points of view were not represented or had not yet emerged”.<sup>17</sup> During 1970, the North-South debate was framed around the development versus environment dilemma. However, in subsequent years,

researchers drew attention to a new subcategory of international environmental politics of liberal institutionalism. The modern era of international decision making on the environment and sustainable development formally began with the UN Conference on the Human Environment, held in Stockholm in 1972. In the conference, more than 250 NGOs constituencies were represented, bound by common values, knowledge and interest.<sup>18</sup> The concept of liberal institutionalism enabled both the developed North and developing South to seek a synthesis of their views – to find a shared common interest. Since the Stockholm Conference, the involvement of NGOs in decision-making processes has escalated, and it is proved that, at present, NGOs have become a significant factor in decision making. In this connection, Biermann *et al.* stated that, “the rising influence of international organizations in itself is part of and one of the driving forces behind, the emerging multi-actor global governance”.<sup>19</sup>

The actions of international organisations (IOs) and NGOs may be different as we know IOs are run by sovereign nation-States inclined to protect their interests. In most cases, the decisions of IOs become prejudiced by hegemonic States, for instance, the United Nations (UN) is mainly dominated by its five permanent members *i.e.*, the US, Russia, UK, France and China. Of these five States, the US was the largest emitter of GHGs during the 20<sup>th</sup> century and China is the major emitter of GHGs at present. These powerful States are playing a sloppy role in the protection of the global environment as became clearer when the US withdrew from the Kyoto Protocol. The neo-liberal actors recognised the increasing debate in climate change as yet another imperial agenda like economic imperialism. Recently, however, these institutions have come forward to take the initiative in protecting the environment.

### East versus West

The North-South divide represents what is probably the single most important political problem, a critical issue around which elites and challengers gravitate in the pursuit of their respective utopias. There are several reasons why the environmental question can worsen North-South relations. For instance, the types of environmental preoccupations differ from North to South. The north carries a globalist discourse, laced with scientific interests and aesthetic considerations; for instance, northern countries want the South to protect its tropical forests so as to reduce global warming, preserve access to untapped reservoirs of organic materials necessary for biotechnological and medical research and maintain nature’s grandeur. On the other hand, Southern elites believe that “western development policies are most responsible for global pollution and resource depletion while the world economic order has institutionalised southern impoverishment”. They perceive environmentalism as a northern phenomenon designed either to legitimise protectionism, aid restraint or to forestall the growth of an autonomous industrial power base for the South. However, burdened by debt

and socio-economic problems, the South is hardly willing to waste money on any pollution control.

Understanding the motivations of the South in terms of economic, social and political growth is essential for appreciating its political nature. “From the very beginning, the developing countries recognized environmental concerns in the North as a distinctively North-South issue and, in some cases, as an effort to sabotage the South’s development aspirations”.<sup>20</sup> Williams identifies four main themes which support the common Southern position: i) “the insistence that the responsibility for global environmental problems resides in the North; ii) the contention that any ameliorative measures taken must not hinder the South’s development prospects; iii) the demand for free transfer of technology from North to South; and iv) the demand for transfer of additional resources to the South to enhance environmental protection”.<sup>21</sup> In that respect, Brown and Chask state that “At one level we can view this simply as the poor countries wanting the rich to clean up their own mess and seeking assistance from the rich in the form of technology and resources by invoking the polluter pay principle and seeking assistance in capacity building”.<sup>22</sup> Adams also argues that “the defining essence of the collective South is the desire to minimize risk, rather than to maximize gain. Given the South’s perceptions about the post-Cold War balance of power and fears of the environment being turned into a tool for eco-colonialism, the South’s achievements in the global politics of sustainable development, although not spectacular, have also not been disastrous”.<sup>23</sup> In fact, from its standpoint, the southern collective has been able to do exactly what it set out to do: minimising the risk of being bulldozed by a northern agenda and eking out little victories whenever possible.

The global environmental problem can modify the North-South relations. An optimist may argue that the urgency of the situation has ensured the presence of environmental issues on the global agenda and has been able to restrict the North from extracting environmental compliance from the South through traditional means of coercion. Besides, the intensity of the South’s economic and environmental crisis must stimulate its participation in co-operative schemes destined to reduce pollution and implement sustainable development in the region. On the other hand, the pessimist would assume that the same urgency is pushing northern countries to harden their economic policies towards the South so as to elicit rapid compliance with northern environmental dictates.

### International Climate Negotiations and the North-South Debate

Global environmentalism did not become a political issue until the 1960s. At the very first stage, there were only a few countries which agreed on climate change and its impacts on human life, and most of the other nations neglected the issue. After the occurrence of several natural disasters, the scenario changed in the 1970s. Even countries which did not believe the claims of

climate-caused environmental damage and impacts began showing concern for environmental security and protection of natural resources. Since then, several conferences have taken place to address the rising problem of environmental degradation. Some vital questions were raised in these conferences such as, how can nations work to solve ever-increasing global environmental problems, who should take responsibility and stand an active bystander in the debate between North and South and many others.

Primarily, the North-South tension in regard to environmental politics began with the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm in 1972. Some classic divides started when Russia boycotted many of the US demands regarding environmental protection such as a ban on whaling, serious protection of other endangered species, restrictions on industrialisation and prohibition of nuclear weapons testing. Then bargaining started regarding consumption. It became clear that rich, developed countries were mainly responsible for bulk consumption of natural resources and in producing huge amount of CO<sub>2</sub> gas. The developed North, however, wanted poor countries to cut emissions, stop deforestation and make the other changes which had once lead to the economic development of the North. Additionally, of course, funding would be needed if the developing and global poor countries were to adopt or to implement the demanded changes. The North's environmental agenda appeared to be intervention and domination over the third world's economic development. After Stockholm, when UN officials were preparing reports for Rio, the process faced intense confrontation. The planners were preparing a treaty to protect and manage the World's "Tropical Forests" because they consider tropical forests as a heritage of humankind. The word "tropical" was the focus of confrontation. Brazil and other countries questioned why only tropical forests? Why not all forests? They demanded such a treaty should be extended to all forests and the word "tropical" should be removed. However, this change was not made. Poor countries pointed out that the natural genes or strains grown by the farmers had been harvested by foreign researchers and pharmaceutical companies for free, while the poor nations still have to pay for the seeds that are protected by the patents and licenses registered elsewhere.

On this point, when policy makers refer to developing countries' "tropical forests" as "heritage of all humankind", they protect their own biological resources with law and then sell them for profit. Several arguments took place between the developing and rich countries on the protection and utilisation of natural resources. As the meeting drew near, cooperation was improving but the north-south debate was on the floor. In spite of these debates, an ambitious agenda was drawn up of about 800 pages, but the question which remained unanswered was the effectiveness of the framed policies or ideas.

### Rio – Earth Summit (1992)

The meeting originally focused on the protection of tropical forests, but the agenda was rejected by many

countries with tropical forests (Brazil, Indonesia, and Malaysia). The developing regions with tropical forests saw the plans as an intervention into their rights and resources by the developed rich global North. Besides, over the debate over biodiversity and genetics the US also refused to sign the Biodiversity Convention at the summit. President Bush believed that it was not ensuring proper international patent and copyright safeguards for American biotechnology. At the summit, the most problematic issue was whether industrialised countries should pay for the costs of policy measures. It became very difficult for the decision makers to meet the \$300 billion price tag to implement Agenda 21.

### Kyoto Protocol

The Protocol was another extension of 1992 UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). It was formulated on the belief that global warming exists and manmade CO<sub>2</sub> is responsible for it. The Kyoto Protocol gave all States GHG-reduction targets of 8–10 percent. Eighty-four countries, including developed countries like the US and Canada, signed the Protocol although some turned away from it later. The EU agreed to cut its emissions by eight percent below the 1990s emission level, Japan by seven percent, the US by seven percent, Canada by six percent and Russia agreed to stay at its 1990s level. In order to come into force, the Protocol needed to be sanctioned by 55 nations to which were attributed more than 55 percent of world's total CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in the 1990s. The agreement was named the 55/55 target. A further spur of the debate was the claim by the US that China and India should cut their emissions as they were the largest emitters of GHGs. In response, China negated the US argument by stating that its *per capita* rate of emissions was lower than that of the US. The Chinese representative demanded that the climate change policy should provide more direct assistance to help industrialising countries such as China to adapt faster with the protocols, and developed countries should provide greater technological assistance to poorer countries. In response, the US delegate said that "the climate change convention is about 'climate change' and not 'development'". In 2001, the US withdrew from the protocol stating that the protocol did not coincide with the US's interests. In other words, the US was unable to reduce its emission rate due to its industry-based economy. In December 2012, Canada also withdrew from the Protocol.<sup>24</sup>

### The United Nations Climate Change Conference, Copenhagen 2009

The main debate at this summit was about how to share the burden of reducing emissions and about managing the financial and technological transfer on the basis of equity and justice. During the conference, another divide between North and South arose based on natural resources – fossil fuel producers (exporters *v.* importers). The summit dealt with issues such as, *inter alia*, the extent to which the use of fossil fuel should be reduced and the reasons that responsibility for climate change is attributed to the use of fossil fuel.

### UNFCCC COP-21

For the first time in 20 years of UN negotiations and debates, this conference aimed to achieve a legally binding agreement on climate, with the aim of keeping global warming below 2°C. The success of the policy depends on States' "implementation", but the effectiveness of the law remains still unclear and unanswered.

There have been several other conferences, meetings, protocols, agreements and (more commonly) disagreements on climate change issues over the years. Interestingly, the North-South debate was present on almost every floor, and it still continues, focusing on still unanswered questions like, who are the prime culprits for environmental damage, who should bear the responsibility, and how could the implementation of policies continue effectively.

The third world is concerned with the environmental damage, including ozone layer depletion, deforestation, emission of toxic waste, scarcity of sufficient drinking water and many others. Practically, compared with the global North, the South is more vulnerable to environmental damage while contributing less to the causation of this degradation. The South, while urged to meet developmental objectives, points out that developed countries, in light of their high levels of consumption, are responsible for most of the environmental damage. Therefore, it concludes that, for all that they are rich and highly advanced in terms of technological and social development, the global North stands accountable and must take serious responsibility for global environmental problems. As such, it argues that they should provide funding and assist with eco-friendly technologies to develop poorer countries.<sup>25</sup>

On the other hand, the North promotes the view that what is done is done and the South should not repeat those earlier mistakes. Therefore, the South, including India and China, should cut their emissions by restricting and limiting their production. This agenda of the North to make the South accountable for preventing environmental problems in the course of southern regions' development is identified as another northern political intervention into the South's development. In other words, the northern concern is viewed as a means of eco-imperialism over the poor developing south.

Both North and South, are equally blaming each other, and this blame game is still continuing. Even though numerous agreements were made, most of the policies, protocols and agendas are not universally accepted due to varying debates by and interests of different stakeholders. As a result, no globally accepted consensus could be achieved to address the environmental problems.

### Impacts on Global Environmental Politics

While there has been a huge increase in the awareness of environmental degradation, there has been no serious attempt or even discussion of how to bridge the divide between the North and South. The North-South divide is not only affecting the structural inequalities in the global economic system, but also attributing to global environmental issues as both are connected to each other.

At the heart of the North-South divide lies the concept of inequality between the two dichotomous blocks. While serious emphasis and analysis of historical economic development is vital to make proper sense of the current international system, structuralism posits that the particular mechanism of inequality and dominance continues to exist today and contribute to the uneven development among and within nations. The difference and relationship between the capital-rich developed Northern regions versus the developing South is not only a defining characteristic, but also the main factor which feeds the casual beliefs and interests of the two blocks and thereby reinforces their dichotomy. Roberts and Parks argue that, "[d]espite the strenuous efforts of rich nations to separate climate issues, the development concerns of poor nations are not going away".<sup>26</sup> While the industrialised nations are increasingly recognising the problem of environmental degradation, there exists a serious need to reduce the rate at which they are using up non-renewable resources. Even though the developed world has just over 20 percent of the world's population, the region consumes over 80 percent of the world's energy, and thus is responsible for the bulk of emissions of GHGs and ozone-depleting gases into the atmosphere.

Many developed nations (North) have developed more stringent environmental standards and believe that the developing countries should also raise their national standards based on western norms. Some may argue that the South should learn from the North's mistakes and avoid the environmental and economic consequences of unsustainable development. On June 14, 1992, the Rio declaration announced that the right to development must be fulfilled equitably while recognising the environmental and developmental needs of present and future generations. However, contrary to the declaration or policy adoptions, which most countries in the summit try to oblige, the US would not accept any such international obligations or liabilities. Thus, while sustainable development has probably become one of the most frequently used phrases in the environment-based summits, the North-South divide has openly challenged the very idea of "what it would really mean by development". There are considerable discussions about the North-South divide between wealthier, economically developed nations and poorer, economically developing countries. However, there is little indication that the industrialised countries are willing to give up their position of advantage. There are many aspects of the current round of GATT negotiations which promote free trade and this will disadvantage developing countries. Industrial countries are also seeking to have GATT regulate internal investment policies of national governments. However, it is clear that the tools of economic analysis that were developed during the last 30 years are no longer applicable to all aspects of this changing situation. At present, about 75 percent of all Southern exports are primary products, and about 90 percent of the world's capital goods exports are generated in the North. To achieve sustainable development and balance in trading, emerging developing countries are

bridging the divide by engaging in partnerships with developed countries. However, although initiatives to promote new technologies and industries can be seen as “win-win” solutions, they run the risk of creating incentives for short-term profit over long-term environmental and social sustainability, as land conversion and deforestation increase.

Again, inequality in terms of vulnerability is also prominent in the North-South divide. The argument gets more relevant and contested each day as the adverse effects of climate change are mostly felt by the South, and the region is dependent on the North to overcome the environmental challenges. Moreover, there have been different perceptions about what constitutes “fair” with regards to cutting GHG emissions. Since there is a lack of a “socially shared understanding”, there has been disagreement between the two blocks about burden sharing. It is understood that international climate negotiations are not immune from the forces that shape the global playing field and the North-South divide carries the danger of blurring our understanding of the causes and solutions to the impasse in negotiations. Therefore, the North-South lens should be used to serve as a means to inform and enhance our understanding of the issue, but not as an end in itself.

### Environmental Movement

Wall stated that “the environmental movement also including conversations and green politics, is a diverse scientific, social, and political movement for addressing environmental issues”.<sup>27</sup> The movement was started in America although it had European roots. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the US emerged as a hegemonic power in world history. After World War II, American industrialisation increased tremendously, transforming the nation from an agriculture-based society to a highly industrialised one. However, the transition of the economy and development sector resulted in creating adverse impacts on the environment with high levels of air pollution, caused by millions of motors and factories spewing chemicals into the atmosphere, the nuclear fallout from atomic tests, water pollution, and disappearance of farmland and forest under suburban development. However, by the time society recognised and accepted the problem, the risk of air and water pollution, diseases, and environmental disasters were becoming prominent, and the initiation of environmental movements became a necessity. According to the definition, the green movement is “the environmental movement sometimes referred to as the ecology movement, also including conservation and green politics, [and] a diverse scientific, social and political movement for addressing environmental issues”.<sup>28</sup> The green movement is an international platform represented by different organisations mainly including every country which has a large membership. Though the movement has common norms and rules, it is not always united in its goals. The green movement politics started in 1970s with the formation of “green parties” in western countries. According to Derek Wall, a prominent British green proponent, “there are four pillars that define green

politics: ecology, social justice, grassroots democracy and non-violence”.<sup>29</sup>

Recently, the environmental movement has been mainly concerned with the North versus South debate, and in most cases the agenda is structured in terms of both regions’ self-interest. Historically, before the formation of Nation-States and the more recent norms and rules to protect the environment, the northern region often dominated the southern through colonialism – a system that generally hampered environmental protection and conservation in colonial areas and the status of their natural resources. Examples include the extensive destruction of forests for plantations, construction of raw-materials-based factories and mass accumulation and extraction of natural resources to the colonisers’ benefit. Clearly, comparison of developed versus developing countries demonstrates that the established colonial powers/countries were highly developed compared to the conquered colonies of the South. This fact supports a widespread suspicion regarding the rules urged by global northerners to restrict and limit the development of the South to protect the environment. Many southern countries question the ever-advancing economy, technology and trading of the global North, while the developing South is pressured to protect the environment and fight problems like deforestation, water contamination and disease

### Challenges for the Vulnerable Countries

Based on the reviewed literature and the above discussed arguments, it is clear that both the North and the South have each made their own contributions to climate change; and that the North has clearly contributed the most to present conditions. In this debate, there are two prime contrasting frameworks for analysing the challenges and vulnerability of countries to environmental change: the biophysical, and the political economy.<sup>30</sup>

In the biophysical framework, the most vulnerable people are those living in the most valuable physical environments. For instance, drought effects would be associated with low or variable rainfall and sandy soils. The political economic perspective sees vulnerability as the creation of the political, social, and economic conditions of society rather than of the physical environment. At present, the poor and developing countries of the South are the most vulnerable to this form of challenge. Oxfam predicted that the human world would worsen as climate change inevitably hurt crop production and disrupted incomes. It emphasised that the number of people at risk of hunger might climb by 10 to 20 percent by 2050, with daily *per-capita* calorie availability falling across the world. According to *IRIN News*, “The World Bank has made a list of the five main threats arising from climate change: droughts, floods, storms, rising sea levels and greater uncertainty in agriculture”.<sup>31</sup> The IPCC’s “Summary for Policymakers” argues that “the impacts of human-induced climate change are likely to be felt in poor countries and poor communities first”.<sup>32</sup> The IPCC highlights the following regions as being particularly

vulnerable: small island developing States; Africa; megadeltas (especially in Asia); and the polar regions. These areas and countries are physically vulnerable because of their location on small low-lying islands or coasts and because of their low adaptive capacity.<sup>33</sup> According to the *Global Climate Risk Index 2015*, Honduras, Myanmar and Haiti were the countries affected most by extreme weather events between 1994 and 2013.<sup>34</sup>

In 2013, the Philippines, Cambodia and India led the list of the ten most affected countries. Table 1 shows the ten most affected countries of the last two decades with their average, weighted ranking.

The last UN assessment in 2007 predicted runaway temperature rises of 6°C or more by the end of this century. That is now thought unlikely by scientists, but average land and sea temperatures are expected to continue rising throughout this century, possibly reaching 4°C above present levels – enough to devastate crops and make life in many cities unbearably hot. For instance, if we study the case of Bangladesh, it is evident that the country is highly vulnerable to climate change in the world. With the increasing climate change and its negative impacts, Bangladesh will fall into poverty with major economic, social and other environmental threats. Over recent years, the region has increasingly been forced to face severe challenges such as huge numbers of people losing their shelter and infrastructure due to the increased frequency of flooding, storms and climate-related disasters, malnutrition, incidents of infectious diseases as a result of changing weather patterns, displacement of people due to river erosion, floods and droughts that lead to livelihood insecurity and many other problems. Hence, it is evident that the low-lying poor countries are the most vulnerable and will remain the front line of victims of human-induced climate change over the next coming century. Unless and until the developed countries adopt mitigation projects, the effects of climate change will continue to devastate these countries. As the North-South debate intensifies, however, it will increase the challenges and make it

difficult to ensure any kind of solutions and adaptation policies.

### The North-South Blame Game

The North and the South have spent decades blaming each other for environmental pollution and forcing each other to take on the onus of atmospheric clean-up. No consensus has yet been reached on which countries should take the lead in the reduction of carbon-dioxide gas emissions. All countries, both developed and developing, have contributed, more or less, to the present climate situation. Developed countries have continued the acceleration engendered by their past history, and developing countries have joined the group, also contributing major environmental devastation. Thus, both parties should take their own responsibility in protecting the environment through mutual cooperation.

On the other hand, when compared with other attempts at global cooperation to combat environmental problems, inter-State cooperation on climate change policies has been more significantly impeded by the global inequality issues and debates. Parks and Roberts highlight that the problems of inequality between the North and the South are creating a major impasse for global climate change prevention.<sup>35</sup> They also argue that since the beginning of the 1990s, most developing countries have refused to adopt GHG emission reduction commitments in the name of “fairness”. At the Kyoto summit, China’s lead negotiator said that, “In the developed world only two people ride in a car, and yet you want us to give up riding on a bus”. Brazil’s Chancellor Luiz Felipe Lamperia said flatly, “We cannot accept limitations that interfere with our economic development”. Ten years later “after rounds and rounds of painstaking international negotiations, the position of most developing countries has not changed significantly”.<sup>36</sup> While the North wants responsibility for GHG reduction to be distributed among all States on the basis of equality, the South wants such distribution to be based on equity. From the South’s point of view,

**Table 1: The long-term Climate Risk Index (CRI): the 10 countries most affected from 1994 to 2013 (annual averages)**

CRI 1994–2013 (1993–2012)	Country	CRI score	Death toll	Deaths per 100,000 inhabitants	Total losses in million US\$ (in Purchasing Power Parities)	Losses per unit GDP in %	Number of Events (total 1994–2013)
1 (1)	Honduras	10.33	309.70	4.60	813.56	3.30	69
2 (2)	Myanmar	14.00	7137.40	14.80	1256.20	0.87	41
3 (3)	Haiti	16.17	307.80	3.41	261.41	1.86	61
4 (4)	Nicaragua	16.67	160.15	2.98	301.75	1.71	49
5 (7)	Philippines	19.50	933.85	1.13	2786.28	0.74	328
6 (5)	Bangladesh	20.83	749.10	0.54	3128.80	1.20	228
7 (6)	Vietnam	23.50	391.70	0.48	2918.12	1.01	216
8 (8)	Dominican Republic	31.00	210.45	2.38	274.06	0.37	54
9 (10)	Guatemala	31.17	83.20	0.68	477.79	0.62	80
10 (12)	Pakistan	31.50	456.95	0.31	3988.92	0.77	141

Source: Global Climate Risk Index 2015.

developing countries need advancement and are aware that the need requires industrialisation and which in return will result in GHG emissions. The global South also brings up the idea the global North should take the lead to reduce GHG emissions because the developed States have a longstanding historical responsibility for the currently accumulated stock of carbon in the atmosphere, and also they have gained economic growth and prosperity by a serious dependence on industrialisation.

At negotiations leading up to the 1992 Earth summit, Southern countries negated the restrictions with the fear of negatively impacting their economy and the development needs of their people. On the other hand, the powerful industrialised rich countries refused to curtail their own excesses unless poor nations did the same.<sup>37</sup> The northern perspective is that history is no longer relevant, and so targets should be set in accordance with present emission levels, treating all States equally. However, this position is quite confusing on one point – who is to take charge of the bulk of the future global GHG emissions reductions. Neither group can be accused separately. The current climate situation and the stock of GHGs in the atmosphere is largely the contribution of rich developed countries, and these countries still continue to emit pollution at the same level. The US, with only four percent of the earth's total population, contributes over 20 percent of all global emissions, while 136 industrialising countries together contribute only 24 percent of it.<sup>38</sup> Overall, the richest 20 percent of the world's population is responsible for over 60 percent of its current emissions. Under this circumstance, we can conclude that the North must take the lead in emissions reduction, without further argument.

On the other hand, at present, some developing States – like China, India and Brazil – have become prominent emitters as an outcome of their development and industrialisation process. China's carbon emissions already exceed those of the US, and have done so since 2008.<sup>39</sup> It has the most emissions measured by country, even though it remains behind the US and the European Union when measured *per capita*.<sup>40</sup> Predictions regarding developed countries suggests that they too will experience a growth in future emissions. In this connection, developed countries are logging roughly one percent annual economic growth; while developing countries are averaging 3.5 percent growth and are expected to maintain a similar growth trajectory in upcoming decades. Global population will also continue to expand over the next 100 years – the lion's share of which will take place in the Southern block. Together economic development and population growth are predicted to raise the South's carbon emissions from 31 percent of the total in 1990 to 60 percent in 2030. Considering all these conditions, unless the South plays a significant role in cutting emissions, global targets will be impossible to meet. Therefore, developing countries should take their own responsibilities and cooperate with the North in atmospheric clean-up.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be said that, even today, the North-South divide is at the core of global environmental politics. Countries that are more resilient to the effects of environmental degradation are apparently not ready to take responsibility for carbon emissions. As a result, the North-South debate prevails on the grounds of unanswered questions such as who should bear the responsibility of the environmental damages. Though two blocks are blaming each other, both the parties are affecting the environment. Therefore, they should establish a globally accepted consensus to free the environment from this blame game and move towards sustainable development.

It is true that both the North and the South are responsible for climate degradation, although, based on past and present emissions and actions, the responsibility of the North is comparatively greater than that of the South. The question is how to minimise the controversy. At this juncture, it is important that policies to tackle climate change be equitable, based on contribution. The question of accountability is also highly important. The North-South debate on global environmental politics can be minimised through accountability regarding GHGs emissions, as well as by establishing active global governance with fair and equitable goals of emission reduction across all countries of the North and the South. In addition, developed countries should reduce their CO<sub>2</sub> emission rate and also make compensation to the vulnerable countries. The developing countries should use environmentally-friendly technology in industry, formulating mutual cooperation for achieving these and other goals. Many scientists have drafted suggestions regarding possible ways to protect the environment and sustainable development. It is the duty of the North and the South to implement such a scheme. Beyond this, the North should more generously support relevant efforts by the South and the South in turn should be aware of their duties and maintain the boundary of emissions. Market-based mechanisms could offer an even better approach to resolving the debate, where emitters are bound by specific emissions levels and must pay compensation where their emissions cross jurisdictional boundaries. Such payments should be “cross-emission based”, such that compensation will increase with the emission rate. In the end, as human beings, our survival is now at great risk because of climate change, and it is time to cooperate and ensure a healthy world for future generations.

## Notes

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## UNFCCC Subsidiary Bodies

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### The Calm Before the Storm

by Cleo Verkuijli

The 46<sup>th</sup> sessions of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change's (UNFCCC) Subsidiary Bodies for Implementation (SBI-46) and Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA-46), as well as the third session of the first meeting of the *Ad Hoc* Working Group on the Paris Agreement (APA-1.3), convened from 8–18 May 2017 in Bonn, Germany. Some 3,900 participants, including more than 2,000 government officials, attended.

As has become commonplace during UNFCCC sessions,<sup>1</sup> what happened outside the negotiating halls took on at least as much significance as the formal talks. A decision from the Trump administration on the Paris Agreement had been expected in the early days of the Bonn negotiations, and uncertainty surrounding a potential US withdrawal from the treaty was initially on the forefront of many minds. However, it quickly became clear that the decisive White House meeting was to be postponed due to "scheduling conflict",<sup>2</sup> and engagement of the smaller-

than-usual US delegation remained ostensibly unchanged compared to previous sessions.<sup>3</sup> With many delegations appearing to appreciate the need for a show of international unity, the Bonn talks proceeded relatively smoothly.<sup>4</sup>

As diplomats in capitals and elsewhere continued to offer political reassurance about their on-going commitment to the Paris Agreement,<sup>5</sup> negotiators were able to delve into the more technical aspects of international climate cooperation, including through further exchanges on the Paris Agreement rulebook; informal consultations on the "facilitative dialogue" scheduled for 2018; and a thorough review of a subset of countries' recent mitigation efforts. However, the US's widely-broadcast renunciation of the Paris Agreement just two weeks after the Bonn talks raises important questions about the international community's ability to uphold this momentum going forward.<sup>6</sup>

This report briefly summarises the highlights of these meetings, and glances ahead towards the 23<sup>rd</sup> session of the UNFCCC Conference of the Parties (COP-23), scheduled for 6–17 November in Bonn.

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