

India's Global Climate Strategy

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Summary

As climate issues get securitised and discussed beyond the United Nations framework, India's approach to climate change has become more strategic and global.

As the dire consequences of climate change loom, India stands at the crossroads, facing unprecedented challenges. In this context, the need for a holistic, strategic approach to address this global and national crisis is now clear. A big part of that engagement will be international partnerships and organisations that could help India meet and address its climate goals, specifically its 2030 commitments and 2070 net zero targets. Since 2015, India's global climate activities have ramped up working with a range of actors to shape and restore climate targets, drum up additional financing for decarbonisation, establishing initiatives to catalyse domestic climate action, and collaborating with trusted partners like the European Union (EU), Japan, Australia and the United States (US) to advance climate progress.

India's climate transition is increasingly tethered to international cooperation. Climate change, more than ever, requires collaborative efforts, even as the 'wicked problem' tests the limits of international diplomacy and governance. The United Nations (UN) architecture, traditionally a cornerstone of global cooperation, faces fragmentation, dispersion and dysfunction, while other more emergent frameworks like the International Solar Alliance, Coalition for Disaster Relief and Infrastructure and the Quad deal with problems like climate change. Concurrently, multilateral development banks find themselves energised by the opportunity to tackle climate through additional financing and lending to countries in the throes of climate crises. In this fluid landscape, the path towards robust climate action becomes challenging for India and its Global South partners.

Working with international partners is not new to India. Historically, India has been more than a mere participant in the global climate politics and discourse; it has been an agenda setter and innovator, contributing to novel solutions at and beyond the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Conference of the Parties (COP) negotiations. New Delhi's growing climate partnerships now span several levels and partners, including international organisations, multilateral development banks and states that serve as a testament to India's adaptability and innovation in pushing the boundaries of climate action. India's progress in driving the need for climate mitigation and adaptation has been commendable and swift. A key question is whether results in terms of reduced carbon emissions will arrive. That is the \$5100 billion question.

[Our report](#) reveals an India that is becoming more agile in the global climate space, working across and between levels to advance its interests vis-a-vis mitigation and adaptation. We argue that it is possible to discern India's climate postures across four tracks:

- 1) *multilateral adaptation*, by working within the UNFCCC regime and existing institutions;
- 2) *minilateral innovation*, by tailoring climate and geopolitical cooperation;
- 3) *trilateral bridging*, by positioning India as a “triangular” South-South- North climate hub; and
- 4) *bilateral expansion*, by connecting climate to economic cooperation through new green partnerships. This policy diversification and innovation is throwing up new opportunities and challenges, especially the need for a comprehensive strategy to balance multiple and often overlapping international tracks towards a low-carbon transition. It maps both what has been done in the past as well as the avenues towards a comprehensive climate strategy built on greater policy coordination and expanded state capacity for India to engage externally.

India has been expanding such engagements. As the climate crisis unfolds, India has little choice but to engage across these four tracks and multiple frameworks. India will have to continue emphasising annual COPs, which remain the political anchor underpinning global climate action. Bilateral climate partnerships, like with the US and EU, could become subject to political winds, with progress hinging on the pace and scope of the larger relationship and how they view India, either strategically or instrumentally. Such relationships are driven by interests, which means that they are vulnerable to domestic political shifts and changes that could reorient core interests.

Undoubtedly, India must remain vigilant to protect its interests. These political currents also inflect specific minilateral partnerships, like the Quad, which are centred on mutual interests, so their importance to addressing issues like climate might wane over time. All these frameworks, however, reveal an India that is strategically linking climate progress to other issue areas, including cooperation to generate investments for the energy, technology, infrastructure and transportation sectors.

All these moves also reflect New Delhi’s adaptability and sophistication, straddling and balancing different institutional burdens. India will matter greatly to all such climate discussions, given its economic size, growing contribution to carbon emissions and potential to absorb financing and technologies to accelerate its climate transition. The focus now must turn there – toward taking stock and assessing how these multiple climate tracks add up to a coherent low-carbon strategy toward the years 2030 and 2070. India’s climate future will be shaped by the diplomatic capacity and choices it makes on these international trade-offs between short and long-term policy horizons, leading to a series of layered engagements.

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