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PERCEPTION-REALITY-VISION-SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

AN OVERVIEW OF THE PARIS AGREEMENT

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RESEARCH BRIEF



Introduction

The Paris Agreement is an agreement within the framework of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). This agreement aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by increasing the ability of states to adopt environment-friendly policies and machinery by making finance flows consistent with a pathway towards low greenhouse gas emissions and climate resilient development by 2020. Almost all UN member states negotiated this agreement in November and December of 2015 which indicated that states have accepted climate change as a brutal reality confronted by millions of people all around the world. The Paris Agreement has been hailed by many as a serious effort of the international community to address environment-related issues. The critics of this agreement have called the deal reached in Paris as “weak, containing no concrete increase in the level of ambition to address climate change”. Whether Paris Agreement is different from the futile conferences/agreements held in the past to address the issues relating to global warming and climate change has yet to be determined.

An Overview of Previous Environment-related Agreements

Following is the overview of various conferences held on environment prior to the Paris Conference.

1. UN Conference on the Human Environment (1972)

The UN Conference on the Human Environment was convened by the General Assembly resolution 2398 (XXIII) of 3 December 1968. It was conducted in the capital of Sweden between 5th to 16th June 1972. The Conference was attended by the delegations of 114 countries. This Conference resulted in the institution of the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP). The meeting approved a declaration containing 26 principles regarding the environment and development that was later named as Stockholm Declaration. Some of these 26 principles included the safeguard of natural resources, stress on renewable energy resources and the help of developing countries to develop environment safeguards .

2. World Commission on Environment and Development (1987)

World Commission on Environment and Development conjointly referred to as the Brundtland Commission presented its report in 1987. It had been established by General Assembly Resolution 38/161 of 19 December 1983. Supported by four years of prior research, the commission printed its report entitled 'Our Common Future' within which the theme of Sustainable Development was established. The concept became one of the most successful approaches to be introduced in many years. The targets of Brundtland Commission were multilateralism and interdependence of countries regarding sustainable development. Our common future placed environmental problems firmly on political agenda.

The mandate of Brundtland Commission was to re-examine the vital problems regarding environment and development and to formulate innovative, concrete and realistic action proposals to cope with them. The Commission focused its attention towards the areas of population, food security, the loss of species and genetic resources, energy, trade and human settlements. The report offered analysis on the environmental limits to economic process throughout the world. However, the report was unable to spot the modes of production that are responsible for degradation of the atmosphere. The Brundtland Commission arranged the groundwork for the gathering of the 1992 Earth Summit and also the adoption of Agenda 21, the Rio Declaration and also the institution of the Commission on Sustainable Development.

3. UN Conference on Environment and Development (1992)

The UN Conference on Environment and Development was convened by General Assembly resolution 44/228 of 20th December 1988. It was held in Rio de Janeiro from 3rd to 14th June 1992. It is also referred to as Earth Summit or Rio Conference. It resulted in the institution of Commission on Sustainable Development. The problems addressed throughout this conference included systematic scrutiny of the pattern of production, alternative sources of energy and also the growing usage and restricted supply of water. A vital accomplishment of the conference was consensus on climate change convention that successively led to the Kyoto Protocol and Paris Agreement.

The Rio Conference resulted in Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, Agenda 21 and Forest Principles. Moreover, vital legally binding agreements were opened for signature that were Convention on Biological Diversity, Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and UN Convention to Combat Desertification. In order to ensure compliance with agreements at Rio, Commission on Sustainable Development was established. Critics point out that many of the agreements made in Rio have not been realized regarding such fundamental issues as fighting poverty and cleaning up the environment.

4. General Assembly Special Session on Environment (1997)

General Assembly session on the environment also referred to as the Earth Summit + 5 was conducted from 23-27 June 1997. Over 50 heads of State and government and 80 ministers and other senior officials attended this session. The aim of this session was to reactivate and intensify international cooperation towards achieving sustainable development in addition to reviewing and appraising the implementation of Agenda 21 which was adopted by UN Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. The end result of this session was General Assembly resolution S-19/2 of 27th June 1997 which was a program for further implementation of Agenda 21.

5. World Summit on Sustainable Development (2002)

The World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) or WSSD Earth Summit 2002 took place in Johannesburg, South Africa from 26th August to 4th September 2002. It was convened to discuss sustainable development by the UN. The WSSD brought together a number of leaders from business and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), 10 years after the Rio Summit and was therefore also informally nicknamed Rio+10. The World Summit reviewed progress on the implementation of Agenda 21 since its adoption in 1992. The outcome documents of this summit were Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development and Plan of Implementation.

6. UN Conference on Sustainable Development (2012)

The UN Conference on Sustainable Development was called for by General Assembly Resolution 66/197. It is also known as Rio+20. The Conference was held in Rio de Janeiro from 13th - 22nd June 2012. The outcome document of the Conference was "The future we want". The 10-day mega summit which culminated in 3-day high level UN Conference was organized by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs and included participation from 192 UN member states in addition to private sector companies and NGOs.

Steps leading towards Paris Conference

The governments of more than 190 UN member states gathered in Paris in the winter of 2015 to discuss a new global agreement on climate change which aimed to reduce global greenhouse gas emissions and thus avoiding the threat of dangerous climate change. The Paris Agreement on the environment was needed since the previous commitments and international agreements on greenhouse gas emissions would run out in 2020 and the international consensus was required to formulate policies on control of greenhouse gases beyond 2020.

The international community has negotiated many agreements on climate change in the past. In 1972, the first major effort was done to assemble stakeholders on one platform to tackle the matter of global warming. Since then, many conferences and agreements were signed. The Rio Summit of 1992 being worth mentioning in which Agenda 21 was passed. That agreement, still in effect, bound the governments to take action to avoid climate change. However, it failed to specify what actions.

The Rio Summit paved the way for Kyoto Protocol. That pact required worldwide cuts in emissions of about 5% compared with 1990 levels by 2012 and each developed country was allotted a target on emissions reductions. But developing countries including China, South Korea, Mexico and other rapidly emerging economies were given no targets and allowed to increase their emissions at will. Various sections in the US tried to persuade the US Congress to ratify the Kyoto protocol but it did not happen and Congress didn't ratify the Kyoto protocol. The Kyoto protocol could not

come into force until countries representing 55% of global emissions had ratified it. For most of the next decade, the Kyoto Protocol could not come into force due to lack of interest and seriousness on the part of the developed and developing countries. But in late 2004, Russia ratified the treaty and so did the European Union (EU). That made up the 55% representation needed for the ratification of the Kyoto Protocol and the protocol finally came into force. But the US, one of the largest polluters on Earth, remained outside of the Kyoto Protocol. This gave rise to the need of developing a new approach to bring in the US and all the major countries including China, the world's biggest emitter of Chlorofluorocarbon (CFC). This paved the way for an international conference on climate change in Paris.

Important Components Of Paris Conference

The historic Paris Agreement could be a stark departure from ineffective agreements on combating global warming in the past. The deal could be a turning point for climate policy since it brings the complete globe beneath similar policy framework instead of solely inserting mandates on industrialized nations. It's conjointly a triumph of the conception of multilateralism and an indication that countries with different interests can, in fact, come together to address a common concern. Following are important components of Paris Agreement.

1. Temperature Target

The Paris Agreement sets a goal of limiting global warming to well below 2 degrees Celsius or 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit, above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 degrees Celsius or 2.7 degrees Fahrenheit above pre-industrial levels through 2100. The inclusion of 1.5 degree Celsius target is a major victory for small island states and other vulnerable nations that face dire climate change-related impacts such as sea-level rise if warming proceeds above 1.5 degrees Celsius.

2. Monetary Assistance

The major component of Paris Agreement which was unprecedented in previous agreement of similar nature is the promised amount of \$100 billion per year on climate aid to the developing world by the year 2020. The agreement deals with this by setting a floor of climate aid to developing nations at \$100 billion and calling for five-year review cycles of climate finance commitments. The agreement also calls upon developing countries to make their own climate finance pledges if they are able to do so on a voluntary basis.

3. Long Term Goal

The long-term goal of Paris Agreement is to send a strong signal to world capitals and financial markets that fossil fuels like coal and oil are on the way out and that there needs to be a massive scaling up of investments in clean energy agreement aims for global peaking of greenhouse gas emissions as soon as possible but does not provide a target date for this to happen. The agreement, therefore, leaves plenty of room for countries such as India to increase their emissions significantly while others cut theirs in an effort to meet this target. It also sets a long term goal of what reads like a scientific definition of carbon neutrality which is when carbon emissions are low enough to be canceled out by the amount of carbon being absorbed by forests around the world.

Main Clauses Of Paris Conference

Following are the main clauses of the Paris Agreement:

1) It calls for holding the rise in international average temperature to well below two degrees Celsius on top of pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 degrees Celsius on top of pre-industrial levels, recognizing that this could considerably cut back the risks and impacts of climate change. This language acknowledges the scientific conclusions that a rise in part temperatures of over two degrees Celsius or 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit would lock the earth into a future of catastrophic impacts including rising sea levels, more devastating floods and droughts, widespread food and water shortages and more powerful storms.

2) To bring the average global temperatures below two degrees Celsius on top of pre-industrial levels, this agreement binds countries to achieve international peaking of gas emissions as presently as attainable recognizing that peaking can take longer for developing country parties and to undertake fast reductions thenceforth. This has sent a clear message to the fossil fuel industry that a lot of the world's remaining reserves of coal, oil and gas should keep within the ground and can't be burned. But the agreement does not call for reaching greenhouse gas emissions neutrality in the second half of the century, a provision that oil producers fiercely resisted.

3) The agreement acknowledges the importance of averting, minimizing and addressing loss and injury related to the adverse effects of temperature change. This was deemed crucial by poor and little island countries that suffer the foremost from extreme weather and from long-run impacts like droughts. However, the provision does not involve or provide a basis for any liability or compensation, a point that wealthy nations, which do not want to be held financially liable for climate change, instead on.

4) The agreement binds all countries to submit updated plans that may ratchet up the stringency of emissions by 2020 and each 5 years thenceforth, a time-frame that the USA and also the EU urged. Asian nations had at the start wanted a ten-year review cycle.

5) The deal requires countries to monitor, verify and report their greenhouse gas emissions using the same global system. The US has insisted that an aggressive system of counting and verifying each nation's emissions is crucial to the success of any plan. The US has also pushed for the creation of an outside panel of experts. Developing countries including China and India had pushed for two separate accounting systems, a more stringent for rich countries, a more lenient one for poor countries.

6) The agreement that takes effects in 2020 calls on nations to determine a brand new collective quantified goal of a minimum of \$100 billion a year in climate connected funding by 2020. It avoids a selected range and even the \$100 billion a year aspiration is mentioned within the call a part of the document, not the action section, to avoid triggering a review by the US Senate. However, it makes clear that the \$100 billion secure in 2009 in Danish capital is that the blank minimum going forward.

7) Once countries update their commitments, they're going to decide to the best attainable ambition however the agreement doesn't set a numeric target. It acknowledges common however differentiated responsibilities and individual capabilities within the light of various national circumstances. This language is crucial to India that believes it will need some time before it can reach peak emissions, given the need to provide 300 million people with electricity. The agreement calls on rich countries to engage in absolute reductions in emissions while calling on developing ones to continue enhancing their mitigation efforts.

8) The agreement set up something called a Capacity Building Initiative for Transparency to help developing countries meet a new requirement that they regularly provide a national inventory report of human-caused emissions, by source, and track their progress in meeting their national goals.



PARIS CLIMATE AGREEMENT

Historical document that legally binds the whole World to participate in climate change fight.



FINANCE

Rich countries will provide minimum of **\$100 billion** to developing ones for climate change adaptation by 2020



WILL COME INTO FORCE BY 2020

If signed by **55 countries** covering 55% of global emissions



AMBITIOUS

Every **5 years** countries shall revise their emissions reduction targets and measures



CLIMATE NEUTRALITY 2050

The **balance** between emissions and sinks should be reached in the second half of XXI century



CLIMATE DAMAGE

For the first time ever the agreement defines climate loss and damage terms but **liability & compensation** are not mentioned



ROLE OF FORESTS

The agreement binds saving and increasing forest area in order to **capture GHGs** from the atmosphere



CLEAN TECHNOLOGIES

The agreement urges to **speed up** clean tech development and international technology transfer

GOAL

Holding the increase in the global average temperature well below

2°C

Pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to

1.5°C

The chart explains the key elements of the Paris Agreement (image courtesy eccinternational.wordpress.com)

Impact Of Paris Agreement On Business And Climate-Change

1. Business

195 UN members signed the historic climate agreement in Paris at the end of 2015. Although the agreement doesn't bind businesses to make and report on emissions cuts, it will require serious efforts by private corporations according to Paris Agreement attendees. At Paris Conference, businesses showed they supported an ambitious agreement and were ready to step up and make commitments to tackle climate change. These commitments ranged from rallying behind carbon pricing and setting science-based emission reduction targets to responsible corporate engagement in policy and major investments in renewable energy. The momentum this created contributed to the ambitious agreement that was reached in Paris. The private sector played a leading role in climate talks. This included commitments from more than 5000 global companies that together represent over \$38 trillion in revenue.

The Paris Agreement is creating a new normal in climate action for the business community. In this new normal, every company that is serious about climate should:

- a) Develop a strategy to build climate resilience. The Paris Agreement is launching a resilience and adaptation collaborative initiative to help companies craft and action these strategies.
- b) Apply an internal carbon price in business decision-making to assist with risk management, financial planning and meeting corporate climate targets.
- c) Increase board expertise on climate risks and climate reporting.
- d) Form industry and value chain partnerships to reduce emissions and build resilience.
- e) Engage with policymakers to maximize the impact of enabling policy environments they are creating.

The effect of Paris Agreement on businesses will mostly center on the energy sector. Renewable sources of energy will become a growing source of power. Fossil fuels will become increasingly marginalized in industrial usage with new unabated coal power banned by regulations. Gas will become the default source of power, with policy forcing greater controls on upstream methane leakage. Government funding will be needed for early carbon dioxide capture and storage demonstrators in some countries and regions, particularly those with fossil fuel reserves. The speed of roll-out will depend on the extent to which these demonstrations deliver cost reductions and economies of scale.

2. Climate-change

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has concluded that it is highly likely that greenhouse gases have caused much of the observed increase in earth's temperature over the past 50 years. Evidence of the increased surface temperature is visible by the large scale loss of sea ice and higher sea levels to extreme weather events such as droughts, wildfires, and floods. In the winter of 2015, almost all UN member states in Paris adopted the first ever universal and legally binding global climate deal called the Paris Agreement. This agreement picks up where Kyoto Protocol left off. The main aim of this deal is to compel the businesses to move away from fossil fuels as primary energy sources and a more hastened approach towards zero carbon energy.

Under the new Paris Agreement, international cooperation on climate safe technologies and machinery and building capacity in the developing world to address climate change will be significantly strengthened. Following the adoption of the Paris Agreement by the Conference of parties, it was deposited at the UN Headquarters in New York and has remained open for one year for signature from 22nd April 2016. Uptill now, 179 states and the EU have signed the agreement. But only 25 states have ratified the agreement so far. Recently, China and the USA – together responsible for 40% world's global emissions- have ratified the pact. The Agreement will enter into force after 55 countries that account for at least 55% of global emissions have deposited their instruments of ratification. With the ratification of the pact by

China and the USA, it is believed that the pact might come into force by the end of this year.

Furthermore, the International Standards Organization (ISO) and the Greenhouse Gas Management Institute held a panel discussion on the sidelines of the Paris talks. The ISO is looking to develop new climate standards to address important new areas of climate neutrality and resilience. Over the past 18 months, they have received a large number of requests for new climate change standard and inquiries are also driven partly by increased awareness of the impacts of climate change. The reduction of greenhouse gases will be a global effort that transcends individual nations and government regulations and participates in emissions trading markets or to demonstrate leadership in corporate social responsibility.

The Paris Agreement, if implemented, will help to reduce global temperature. It will result in global cooperation to fight the destructive effects of climate change. Air, water, and atmospheric pollution will be reduced which will affect ecosystem positively. The reliance on fossil fuels will be reduced significantly and more focus will be on renewable energy resources. The depletion of the ozone layer will be stopped and a better environment will be the result if Paris Agreement is followed in true spirit.

Criticism On Paris Agreement

Leaders from around the world gathered in Paris for Climate Change Conference to discuss how to combat climate change. However, the critics of this agreement argue that this agreement will increase the cost of production of products in every industry which will result in price hike and decrease in industrial outputs. Fossil fuels constitute the main source of fuel used in industries worldwide. Restricting the use of conventional energy sources as laid out by Paris Agreement will significantly harm the economies of countries. Replacement of present industrial technologies with new environmental-friendly technology will be costly and it will directly or indirectly increase the cost of goods and services.

Critics argue that it will be quite difficult for companies to keep the consumers away from the costs incurred by them as a result of the transformation of technologies. Companies will pass higher costs on to consumers or absorb the costs which prevent hiring and new investment. As prices rise, consumers buy less and companies will drop employees, close entirely or move to other countries where the cost of doing business is low and where Paris Agreement has granted concessions regarding the strict environment policies which has been imposed specifically on developed countries. The result is few opportunities for workers in the US, EU and China, less economic growth and higher unemployment.

The opponents of Paris Conference on climate-change also stress that the plan to control global temperatures agreed in this conference lack enforcement mechanisms. The Paris Agreement will compel its signatories to formulate domestic policies to ensure the reduction in their respective carbon emissions. The critics argue that this compulsion is based on morality and any country in the name of national interest can bypass the provisions of this agreement. This agreement also has granted too many concessions to developing countries such as India, South Africa, and China who combine are major contributors to global CFC emissions. The critics also agree that even if the developing countries are serious in their efforts to formulate environmental friendly policies as envisaged by the Paris Conference, they lack the resources to implement those policies.

The agreement binds the signatories to present an annual report on the greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in their respective countries. However, no commission or body has been established under this deal which can authenticate the reports submitted by each signatory. This will not only create hurdles for the implementation of Paris Agreement but will also lead to the blame game between various nations accusing each other of being responsible for GHG emissions. The environmental friendly technologies which this deal binds to be used in industrial production is too expensive for developing countries and it they will have to allocate huge chunks of their budget for this purpose which seems impossible for such poor states.

Consequences Of Disagreement On Global Warming Issue

The Paris Agreement is very vital not for people belonging to specific country or region but for the entire globe. The temperatures throughout the world are increasing. The pollution caused due to industrial waste and the CFC emissions

due to industrial and military activities have damaged ozone layer which has further exacerbated the environmental problems. The sea levels are rising and glaciers in North and South pole are melting at an unprecedented rate. This has created existential threats for people living in low-lying states such as the Marshall Islands and Maldives. The natural weather cycle is also being affected by this global increase in temperatures. This is resulting not only in floods, deforestation, and desertification but also droughts, famines, food and water shortages.

All the problems mentioned above have given rise to the need for international consensus to combat global warming. A single state cannot solve this issue on its own since every nation, big or small, developing or developed has contributed to this menace of global warming. Various international conferences were held in the past to sort out this problem of global warming but politics prevailed over common sense and those agreements failed to materialize. This disagreement led to further deterioration of the problem of global warming. The world is facing the consequence of the disagreement.

The contemporary effects of global warming and the fears of deterioration of this problem have increased the importance of Paris Conference. The entire international community gathered in Paris, the capital of France, to sort out methods and to develop an international consensus to fight the problem of global warming. The world leaders were assisted by scientists, doctors, businessmen, scholars and experts from various walks of life with the sole purpose of combating global warming. The historic Paris Agreement was signed by almost all UN member states in December 2015. This agreement has various weaknesses but it is indeed a serious step towards the right direction which is finding the solution to the problem of global warming.

Conclusion

The Paris Agreement is special in a number of ways. The international conference on climate in Paris united almost all UN member on the agenda of solving the problems which mother nature is facing regardless of their political differences. The agreement calls for the reduction in CFC and GHG emissions by all parties to the agreement. It also aims to persuade the parties to change old industrial technologies which use fossil fuels to environmental-friendly technologies. This agreement calls for the establishment of a huge budget to help all nations achieve this goal. The deal also requires the parties to submit their annual reports on their respective CFC emissions. The deal has also been criticized by many who cite the absence of enforcement mechanism as a cause of the weakness of this agreement. They argue that businesses and especially small industries in third world countries would suffer as a result of this agreement. Regardless of the criticism on the Paris Agreement, it is undoubtedly a revolutionary deal which has brought together all international players on a single point agenda of making our environment clean and safer for this generation and generations to come.

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