

8<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Climate Change  
**Climate Action: Mitigation and Adaptation in a Post-  
Paris World**

*4 -5 August, 2017*

*Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai<sup>1</sup>*

Background Note

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<sup>1</sup> The 8<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Climate Change at TISS is supported by Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung

The Paris Agreement, drafted in December 2015 has been ratified by 149 of the 197 Parties to the UNFCCC as of June 22, 2017. The Agreement signals a commitment to keeping temperature rise to “well below 2°C” from pre-industrial levels and, in fact, “pursuing efforts to limit temperature rise to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels”. This goal is to be achieved through the self-determination of mitigation efforts by each country, viz. Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC), which will be monitored and reviewed from time to time. However the post-Paris negotiation process has been dealt a major setback with the US President deciding to withdraw the United States from the Agreement.

Even without this setback however, there is definitely a disjuncture between the two most important aspects of the Paris Agreement, viz. the global target for limiting temperature rise and the self-determined mitigation commitments by individual countries. A global target for restricting temperature rise to below 1.5 or 2 deg. C implies in scientific terms a cap on the total carbon that can be emitted into the atmosphere even though such a cap may not have found explicit mention in the Paris Agreement. On the other hand, the sum total of the mitigation commitments put forward by each country may be well beyond the emissions allowed to the world to restrict temperature rise to a specific level. This is in fact true at the present juncture as the emissions reductions proposed by countries in Paris are well short of what is required to restrict temperature rise to below 2 deg. C, let alone 1.5 deg. C. In addition to this, parties are under no obligation to increase the ambition of their proposed mitigation efforts and only under a non-binding moral obligation to meet even the proposed targets, inadequate as they may be. While acknowledging the inadequacy of the existing efforts, the outgoing Secretary of State for the US, John Kerry, had nevertheless argued that the Agreement would send a signal to businesses the world over that green investments were the road to the future. To leave the future of the planet to the whims of the market and the faith that global capital would recognize its self interest in investing in climate change mitigation would be a dubious strategy in itself, but the withdrawal of the US from the Agreement has exposed the insecurity of definitive action even on this front. Without one of the largest emitters of carbon dioxide (in both per capita and historical terms) making an effort to reduce emissions, the combined efforts of others are likely to be either woefully inadequate or put unreasonably high burdens on less-developed countries.

However, climate action on both the mitigation and adaptation front continues to remain important for countries such as India which find themselves in a uniquely challenging situation.

It can be argued that green technologies can no longer be categorized as ‘necessary but expensive’ and are rapidly becoming competitive with conventional energy technologies. There is growing evidence to support this argument. On the other hand, it is not yet evident that the large amounts of infrastructure and industrial deficits in less developed countries can be overcome alongside this energy transition. This however needs to be concretely debated to address the question of whether it is in the interests of less developed countries to pursue an energy transition voluntarily and unilaterally.

It is also true that a large section of the global population, especially in less developed countries, is extremely vulnerable to the potential impacts of climate change. A weak effort in mitigation would imply a correspondingly higher effort required to adapt to the inevitable changes in climatic patterns. The inclusion of the 1.5 deg. C target in the Paris Agreement has muddied the waters considerably as regards to adaptation finance. There is no doubt that a 2 deg. C temperature rise would result in greater impacts and greater adaptation requirements than a 1.5 deg. C temperature rise. However a global commitment to the 1.5 deg. C target may be used to imply the requirement of adaptation funding to address impacts of this reduced temperature target. The need to begin building a scientifically sound understanding of what climate change adaptation would entail is therefore urgent and irrefutable.

Many less developed economies are undergoing rapid structural transitions. Such transitions are technically, economically, and politically challenging in and of themselves. The addition of the growing requirements of climate change mitigation and adaptation within the confines of an unequal world order significantly increases the degree of difficulty in ensuring a decent life to a majority of the population living in these countries. It is this context that should inform discussions and deliberations on climate action, especially in less-developed countries. The conference on climate change at TISS will attempt to bring this perspective to the discussion even as it includes a broad range of topics – from the developments in climate science to sector specific interventions for climate change mitigation and adaptation. The conference will host academicians, policy makers, experts and representatives of civil society from within and outside the country. The focus of the discussions will be on sector specific developments and new strategies to achieve equitable outcomes in the aftermath of the Paris Agreement.