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DUAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CLIMATE CHANGE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

The wide-ranging potential impacts of climate change on sustainable development and vice versa, suggest that the linkages between these two topics need to be critically analysed. On the one hand, climate change influences key natural and human living conditions and thereby also the basis for social and economic development, while on the other hand, society's priorities on sustainable development influence both the GHG emissions that are causing climate change and the susceptibility. Climate change is not just a long-term issue. It is happening today, and it entails uncertainties for policy makers trying to shape the future.

Climate policies can be more effective when consistently embedded within broader strategies designed to make national and regional development paths more sustainable. This occurs because the impact of climate variability and change, climate policy responses, and associated socio-economic development will affect the ability of countries to achieve sustainable development goals. Conversely, the pursuit of those goals will in turn affect the opportunities for, and success of, climate policies. Recognizing the dual relationship between SD and climate change points to a need for the exploration of policies that jointly address SD and climate change. This will require an approach that goes beyond Kyoto Protocol and Paris Agreement. This Paper will discuss the linkages between Climate Change and Sustainable Development and which kind of approach should be adopted to address the issue of climate change.

KEYWORDS: carbon emissions, climate change, sustainable development, international cooperation

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INTRODUCTION

Climate change is the most significant challenge to achieving sustainable development, and it threatens to millions of people in the world. Climate change is not just a long-term issue. It is happening today, and it entails uncertainties for policy makers trying to shape the future¹. Climate change involves all three dimensions of sustainable development: the economic, the environmental and the social dimension. Addressing this challenge demands a long term perspective on how our actions today will affect the lives of our children, and it also demands a dialogue with all stakeholders involved in order to reach viable solutions. Developing countries will suffer most from the effects of climate change. Their economies are more dependent on natural resources, such as agriculture, forestry and fisheries, and they often lack the infrastructure, the financing and capacity to adapt to a changing climate². People are experiencing the significant impacts of climate change, which include changing weather patterns, rising sea level, and more extreme weather events. The greenhouse gas emissions from human activities are driving climate change and continue to rise. They are now at their highest levels in history. Without action, the world's average surface temperature is projected to rise over the 21st century and is likely to surpass 3 degrees Celsius this century—with some areas of the world expected to warm even more. The poorest and most vulnerable people are being affected the most³.

THE CLIMATE PROBLEM

The climate problem Climate change is a serious and urgent issue. The Earth's climate is changing, and the scientific consensus is not only that human activities have contributed to it significantly, but that the change is far more rapid and dangerous than thought earlier (IPCC 2007)⁴. While climate change results from activities all over the globe (with rather unevenly spread contributions to it), it may lead to very different impacts in different countries, depending on local/regional environmental conditions and on differences in vulnerability to

¹ Rachel Kyte “Climate Change Is a Challenge For Sustainable Development” available at <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/speech/2014/01/15/climate-change-is-challenge-for-sustainable-development>

² Angel Gurría, OECD Secretary-General “Seminar on “Sustainable Development and Climate Change: International and National Perspectives” available at <http://www.oecd.org/newsroom/seminaronsustainabledevelopmentandclimatechangeinternationalandnationalperspectives.htm>

³ <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/climate-change-2/>

⁴ Tariq Banuri and Hans Opschoor “Climate Change and Sustainable Development”, pdf file available at http://www.un.org/esa/desa/papers/2007/wp56_2007.pdf

climate change³—independent of the contributions to climate change of these countries. It is likely to undermine the sustainability of livelihoods as well as development. The worst impacts will fall on developing countries, in part because of their geographical location, in part because of weak coping capacities, and in part because of more vulnerable social, institutional, and physical infrastructures⁵.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Sustainable development, defined as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs”, entails a harmonious integration of a sound and viable economy, responsible governance, people’s empowerment, social cohesion and ecological integrity. Sustainable development does not mean economic stagnation or giving up economic growth for the sake of the environment; it should entail promoting economic development as a requisite for maintaining environmental quality. Economic development leads to increased capacity to address environmental and social problems. Maintaining environmental quality, in turn, is essential for sustainable development⁶.

DUAL RELATIONSHIP OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

There is a dual relationship between sustainable development and climate change. On the one hand, climate change influences key natural and human living conditions and thereby also the basis for social and economic development, while on the other hand, society’s priorities on sustainable development influence both the GHG emissions that are causing climate change and the vulnerability⁷.

The link between climate change and sustainable development stems from the fact that climate change is a constraint to development, and sustainable development is a key to capacities for mitigation and adaptation. It follows that strategies for dealing with sustainable development and climate change have many common elements so that applying them

⁵ Ibid

⁶ <http://www.fao.org/docrep/011/i0670e/i0670e03.htm>

⁷ https://www.ipcc.ch/publications_and_data/ar4/wg3/en/ch2s2-1-3.html

together creates synergies. It also follows that since dealing with climate change exclusively could be very expensive, it has to be factored into the development agenda⁸.

Climate policies can be more effective when consistently embedded within broader strategies designed to make national and regional development paths more sustainable. This occurs because the impact of climate variability and change, climate policy responses, and associated socio-economic development will affect the ability of countries to achieve sustainable development goals. Conversely, the pursuit of those goals will in turn affect the opportunities for, and success of, climate policies⁹.

ADDRESSING CLIMATE CHANGE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Sustainable development has become part of all climate change policy discussions at the global level, particularly due to adoption of Agenda 21 and the various Conventions resulting from the UNCED-1992. The generally accepted and used definition as given by the Bruntland Commission is ‘development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’¹⁹. Sustainable development has become an integrating concept embracing economic, social and environmental issues. Sustainable development does not preclude the use of exhaustible natural resources but requires that any use be appropriately offset. This concept is not acceptable to many developing countries since it seems to disregard their aspirations for growth and development. Further, sustainable development cannot be achieved without significant economic growth in the developing countries¹⁰.

INDIA’S RESPONSE TO CLIMATE CHANGE CHALLENGES

India has been pressing at the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and other international conferences for collaborative development of clean technologies and immediate transfer of existing technologies which are environment friendly. India has also been trying to impress upon developed countries to transfer environmentally sound and cleaner energy

⁸Supranote6

⁹ Supranote 7

¹⁰https://www.researchgate.net/publication/237247341_Climate_change_sustainable_development_and_India_Global_and_national_concerns

technologies into the limited public domain for use by developing countries for early adoption, diffusion and deployment accompanied with transfer of financial resources. India had also called for early operationalization of the Adaptation Fund and Special Climate Change Fund under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change for addressing Climate Change issues in the developing countries. India is a partner to the new Asia Pacific Partnership on Clean Development and Climate which consists of key developed and developing countries— Australia, China, Japan, South Korea and the USA besides India. It focuses on development, diffusion and transfer of clean and more efficient technologies and is consistent with the principles of the UNFCCC and complements the efforts under the UNFCCC and will not replace the Kyoto Protocol¹¹. In December 2015, the 21st Session of the Conference of the Parties (COP21/CMP1) convened in Paris, France, and adopted the Paris Agreement, a universal agreement whose aim is to keep a global temperature rise for this century well below 2 degrees Celsius and to drive efforts to limit the temperature increase even further to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels¹².

CONCLUSION

Climate change is now affecting every country on every continent. It is disrupting national economies and affecting lives, costing people, communities and countries dearly today and even more tomorrow. Climate change and sustainable development are interlinked problems that pose a serious challenge to humanity. Although the issues are complex and serious, both problems could be solved together, provided we begin immediately¹³. Implementation of the Paris Agreement is essential for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, and provides a roadmap for climate actions that will reduce emissions and build climate resilience.

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¹¹ “CLIMATE CHANGE: CHALLENGES TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN INDIA”, RAJYA SABHA SECRETARIAT, available at http://rajyasabha.nic.in/rsnew/publication_electronic/climate_change_2008.pdf

¹² <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/topics/climatechange>

¹³ <http://www.mohanmunasinghe.com/pdf/WILEY-Wires-CC-SD-Oct2010.pdf>