

A STOP SIGN: ON INDIA'S GROWING CARBON EMISSIONS

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Environmental Degradation - GHGs, Ozone Depletion and Climate Change

It is no surprise that the International Energy Agency found that [India's carbon emissions grew by 4.8%](#) during 2018, in spite of the national focus on climate change in energy policy. There is wide recognition of the fact that Indians are not historically responsible for the problem, and it is the rich nations led by the U.S. that have pumped in the stock of carbon dioxide linked to extreme climate impacts being witnessed around the globe. As the IEA points out, India's emissions have grown, but per capita they remain less than 40% of the global average. Equity among nations is therefore at the centre of the discussion on energy emissions, and the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities is central to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Reassuring as this may be, the universal challenge of climate change has grown to such proportions that urgent action to sharply cut carbon emissions is crucial, and all countries, including India, must act quickly. Intensive measures in key sectors — scaling up renewables to raise their share in the energy mix, greening transport, updating building codes and raising energy efficiency — will help meet the national pledge under the Paris Agreement to cut energy intensity of GDP by 33-35% by 2030, over 2005 levels.

'India third largest contributor to carbon emission'

At the global level, renewable sources of energy grew by 7% during 2018, but that pace is grossly insufficient, considering the rise in demand. Moreover, it was China and Europe that contributed the bulk of those savings, in large measure from solar and wind power, indicating that India needs to ramp up its capacity in this area. In fact, as the founder of the International Solar Alliance, India should lead the renewables effort. Yet, in spite of falling prices and rising efficiency, the potential of rooftop solar photovoltaics remains poorly utilised. It is time State power utilities are made responsible for defined rates of growth in the installation of rooftop systems. A second priority area is the cleaning up of coal power plants, some of which are young and have decades of use ahead. This process should be aided by the UNFCCC, which can help transfer the best technologies for carbon capture, use and storage, and provide financial linkage from the \$100 billion annual climate fund proposed for 2020. India's record in promoting green transport has been uninspiring, and emissions from fossil fuels and the resulting pollution are rising rapidly. The Centre's plan to expand electric mobility through financial incentives for buses, taxis and two-wheelers needs to be pursued vigorously, especially in the large cities. Inevitably, India will have to raise its ambition on emissions reduction, and participate in the global stocktaking of country-level action in 2023. It has the rare opportunity to choose green growth, shunning fossil fuels for future energy pathways and infrastructure.

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